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Lessons learned on leadership and life

Life lessons can come in interesting packages. Last month, DLA Piper hosted its third Global Women's Leadership Summit in Chicago. It's an award-winning Continuing Legal Education event targeted to clients and, in particular, female general counsels and other high-level in-house female lawyers.

The theme of this year's summit was the emerging roles of general counsels and how best to navigate through today's dynamic global business environment. The sold-out event kicked off Sept. 29 with an evening reception and dinner featuring a conversation with White House senior adviser Valerie Jarrett hosted by Mara Liasson, national political correspondent for NPR.

On Sept. 30, the summit showcased two keynotes, Michelle Bernard and Liza Donnelly, and five panel conversations regarding the various hats that general counsels wear and how those roles affect their duties and responsibilities as well as issues relating to professional development and advancement.

The summit was an amazing success. Something magical and intoxicating happened over those two days, and the feedback has been extraordinarily positive.

I am honored and privileged to have served as chair of this year's summit. For nearly two years, I worked extensively with a dedicated group at DLA Piper across numerous practice groups and geographies, including partners at the firm as well as colleagues from areas such as business development, professional development and events planning.

There are many things I learned about myself and others during the planning process and the summit — so many lessons

about leadership, navigating politics, the interconnectedness of seemingly disparate things, how best to get things done and the importance of developing contingency plans.

I will always remember, treasure and carry these lessons with me into the world and would like to share a few of them here.

- **Build it and they will come:** Whether designing a client event or building a baseball field, it is within our power to create something thoughtful, unique and powerful that will pique others' interest and will compel them to join, even if they don't fully understand what they are signing up for at the time. We should remember to dream big and to believe in the dream, because we can do what it takes to make it come true.

- **Begin with the end in mind:** When we are at the helm of a massive ship, we must have a clear understanding of our destination and how we will get there. We must also expect the unexpected. The ship can't turn or stop on a dime, and we need to stay the course, even when issues crop up.

- **Create a sense of belonging:** There was a strong sisterhood at the summit. It was a sense that we are all in this together, have a deep respect and caring for each other and want nothing more than to share our wisdom and to learn from one another. Just imagine how powerful this sentiment can be if achieved on a more massive scale.

- **Be authentic:** This theme came up time and again. Being authentic must be the foundation of all that we do, including our leadership style, our decision-making process and our interactions with others. To be truly authentic, we must have a strong sense of self and empathy for others.

PARADIGM SHIFT



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- **Be willing to take risks:** This should be our life's mantra. Lawyers are not generally wired to embrace risk, which makes this much more difficult. But just remember that most great things in life don't happen when all you are doing is the same thing day in and day out.

- **Take control of life:** There is great value in being consistently mindful of where we are, where we have been and where we are headed. We also must think carefully about what we want and whether we are on the road to accomplishing those goals. If not, we need to consider the necessary changes to get us there.

- **Let nature take its course:** This is not inconsistent with taking control of our lives. Rather, we should strive to strike that delicate balance between the two. While there is a lot we can control in our lives, there is

also much that is out of our hands. We should seek the wisdom we need to know the difference and be open minded about the opportunities that cross our paths, both expected and unexpected.

- **Follow your intuition:** There was much discussion about how general counsels are often called upon to make important decisions with incomplete or imperfect information. It's important to treat our intuition as a valuable resource in our decision-making process.

- **Be generous:** The summit was filled with countless expressions of generosity. Keynotes, panelists and attendees gave several days of their lives and traveled from across the globe to participate. They shared many pearls of wisdom, advice and anecdotes which enabled us all to learn and grow. It is now incumbent upon us to share with others and to pay it forward.

- **Empower others:** We all sell ourselves short. We must do a better job of believing in ourselves, and to feel equipped to do whatever it is that we set out to do — whether it is becoming the general counsel of a company, starting a new business or beginning a new life in a foreign country.

We also must celebrate our accomplishments and pay homage to the lessons learned in experiencing those things which may not have worked out the way we wanted. It is through both our successes and failures that we put our best foot forward and can empower others to be their best.

I thank everyone who touched my life through this amazing experience and for all of their selfless contributions. It has been an incredible experience which I will cherish always.