

WORLD IP DAY: WOMEN IN INNOVATION AND CREATIVITY

K&L Gates Q&A Series

World IP Day: Women in Innovation and Creativity

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This Q&A Spotlight features K&L Gates attorney Serena Totino and client Arianna Iacomelli from Furla discussing their growth in their profession.



Serena Totino

K&L Gates
IP Procurement and Portfolio
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Arianna Iacomelli

IP Legal Counsel
Furla

Q: Briefly describe the nature of your practice.

Serena: I am junior associate in the IP team in the London office of K&L Gates LLP. I am in charge of trademark procurement, and I work closely with fashion companies, such as Furla. My area of expertise includes design rights and copyrights, as well as domain names.

Arianna: Since I first joined Furla two years ago, I have been supporting on a worldwide basis design, marketing, digital, and licensing departments on a wide range of activities going from brand protection, pre-litigation, and litigation to legal clearance, contract drafting, and privacy compliance related to CRM initiatives. Also, I am excitingly learning more about art law due to the Furla Foundation art program.

Q: What have been your most significant successes as a woman in the profession, and how did you achieve them?

Serena: I think that as a junior lawyer, a major success is to have been proactive during my training contract and to have exposed myself to practicing in five different jurisdictions. This is now giving me the chance to obtain a double qualification as an Italian lawyer (avvocato) and a solicitor. I find this aspect of my education particularly relevant as it allowed me to combine the academic world of civil law with the business-oriented practice of the common law system.

Arianna: So far, closing some successful transactions and, going back to a few years ago, passing the French bar exam. Both were achieved through tenacity, pragmatism, and the support of my colleagues (passing the bar exam was also achieved with a whole summer spent in the library!). In any case, I would say that in our profession we can have small daily successes, such as detecting tricky clauses, anticipating problems, and sensitizing the business to the eventual risks.

Q: What have been the most important ways you've been mentored in your career?

Serena: Mentoring is not an easy job. I have been lucky enough to meet wonderful lawyers along the way. They have taught me how to manage the stress of acting in court, how to build long-lasting client relationships, and, most importantly, how to use my knowledge and expertise to assist our clients in a

competitive market. In my opinion, a mentor is someone who gives you the chance to grow by involving you in all the activities that make this job the most beautiful on Earth. A good mentor is also someone who understands your potential and gives you the tools to develop your own professional identity, sharing their “secrets” and letting you make the most out of it. Well, I am lucky enough to be mentored on a daily basis, as I am constantly inspired by the people I am working with and, ultimately, this is what a mentor really does.

Arianna: I have been mentored in multiple ways and took stock of each experience. My mentors taught me the importance of attention to details, the art of drafting clauses, and, above all, they shared generously with me their know-how. Thanks to the trust that my current boss has in me and the team, I have learned to work independently and to pragmatically approach every single matter (which are never the same). Also, continuous dialogue with external consultants and colleagues from business gives me interesting insights.

Q: How have you struck a balance between your various life activities?

Serena: A good work-life balance does not come easily. It involves teamwork. If the people on your team are able to manage various life activities, then you will as well. Being flexible and understanding the responsibilities of your role is essential to performing well and obtaining some extra free time when most needed. It is a give-and-take game that will pay off and make you proud of both your personal and professional life.

Arianna: Next question? For the moment, I am still waiting for 53-hour days. Meanwhile, I do my best to combine my passion for IP with many other interests, which makes my days quite full. Also, I feel lucky as my job has a lot to do with art and creativity.

Q: What accomplishment or leadership role did you feel made a significant impact on your career?

Serena: There is something we learn very early on in this career. Being a lawyer goes beyond acquiring knowledge and sitting at your desk (although this is a big part of it). It involves different skills that are not always taught in law school. One of these skills is connecting with people and maintaining client relationships. Personally, this is the aspect of this profession that I love the most and that few people are really good at. In this respect, there is one recent accomplishment that I am particularly proud of. It is the establishment of a networking community. I organize monthly events to meet other practitioners and share experiences and knowledge in different fields of law. The ultimate goal of this initiative is to build a solid network and practice all those marketing and business-related skills that we all need to grow in this career.

Arianna: As mentioned before, successfully passing the French bar exam in Paris, and seeing how much it was acclaimed by my friends and professionals around me, made me realize that I should have been proud of such an achievement and that hard work and sacrifices are always worth it. Being able to build trusted relationships with colleagues from other departments in order to work in a symbiotic and transparent environment is also one of my accomplishments.

Q: If you could travel back in time to your first-year associate self, what advice would you give yourself?

Serena: No need to travel that far! The best advice I would give to myself is to keep working as hard as I did so far in order to be able to give answers to our clients’ concerns and assist successful companies in navigating the world of intellectual property, since, after all, protecting innovation and creativity worldwide is the ultimate goal of this profession.

Arianna: This is a difficult question as I am 27 years old and, despite having grown a lot in the past few years, I still feel close to the 23-year-old new IP initiate. However, I would certainly encourage myself

during the toughest moments, when feeling overwhelmed by work, that the more you see, the more you reap the rewards.