

Inspiring Women

Episode 28: Carrie Valiant

Laurie McGraw:

Welcome to Inspiring Women with Laurie McGraw. I am your host, Lori McGraw. I have spent the past 30 years in leadership and over the years I've come to learn one thing. Women need women. And not just any women, but inspiring women. Tune in every week to hear from women at the pinnacle of their careers, and from others who are just starting out. Episodes can be found at inspiringwomen.show, or subscribe on your favorite podcast app. Thanks for listening, and I hope you will be inspired.

Laurie McGraw:

Welcome to another episode of inspiring women, and today we're speaking with Carrie Valiant. She is an attorney with Epstein Becker Green. She's a member of the Firm in the Healthcare and Life Sciences practice out of Washington DC. Now Carrie has been with the firm since the beginning actually, and she does many things with Epstein Becker Green. Importantly, she's the chair of the firm's Diversity and Professional Development Committee. Over her career, she's done a lot of work in the area of healthcare fraud, and writing and working in that area. She writes and lectures extensively in this specific area, and she's well-recognized as an important and accomplished healthcare expert lawyer, being recognized by her peers, being recognized as Washington DC Super Lawyers, some of the best lawyers in America, on The Legal 500 in the United States, and many other awards over her tenure. Now she has a degree from State University in New York, her law degree from George Washington University, and she's on the board of many organizations, importantly women business leaders. And Carrie, I'm really pleased to be talking to you this morning.

Carrie Valiant:

Thank you so much for having me Laurie. First, let me say how pleased and honored I am to be here today. Thank you so much.

Laurie McGraw:

Well, thank you, Carrie. And you've been at the firm a long time, so I want to talk a bit about your career. But I really want to hone in on some of the work that you do in diversity, equity and inclusivity. You lead the committees, you help develop the talent at the firm, and you've been doing that for a while. And I think that's a really important area right now, but let's start with talking about you. What are you doing? What do you do at the firm? What are you doing right now?

Carrie Valiant:

So as you mentioned, I'm a healthcare fraud and abuse lawyer. So in addition to a number of interesting government investigations that I really can't talk about too much, there's a new OIG regulation that came out with the turn of the year that gives greater protection to value based arrangements under the front abuse laws. And I'm working with a number of clients now to think

strategically about how to take advantage of the new latitude to pay on outcomes and other health measures, rather than just sort of fee for service. Every time you do a service you get paid for it. So the one thing about healthcare law is that it is never a dull moment. There's always something new on the horizon. And then also I have I guess what I call my side gigs at the firm. As you mentioned, I head up Epstein Becker Green's diversity committee. So the last year has been as you might imagine quite busy and challenging. But in every challenge, I feel that there's an opportunity. And the opportunity now is that we have people's attention, and we're able to accomplish quite a bit.

Laurie McGraw:

Yeah, I think the side gigs are very interesting. It has been quite a year and employee resource groups and DEI efforts at organizations are really important, so I want to dig into that. But before we do Carrie, you've been at the firm a long time. And today, just in terms of how long people stay with any one organization, those numbers are getting lower and lower. Yours is measured over years. And so what has kept your interest? Healthcare law is interesting? What's kept your interest in why you've been satisfied to stay at one firm for so long?

Carrie Valiant:

So one of the things about Epstein Becker Green is that I've always felt like I've had the autonomy to do what I want to do and the dedication of firm resources to help me make it happen. So there aren't that many firms that would support an attorney, mind you I was an associate at the time, to write a book. But the firm supported me to write the AHLA book on healthcare fraud and abuse. And I think that was a long time ago, and it certainly was a main thing that promoted my career. But I think you still always have certain pivot points in your career where you do a check-in and you make sure you're in the right place. And for me, every time I checked in with myself it was always that I thought I had the most interesting work on my desk there was to do.

Carrie Valiant:

And I had a continuing firm commitment to support what I wanted to do both in my practice area and outside the firm. And so it always seemed to be a place where I could make my career grow. And even at this late stage, I still want to be growing. You never really reach a plateau. You always want to move on to the next challenge and the next thing. Really it goes beyond my practice area because at EBG I've had the opportunity and support to make a difference in the firm and in the world. So a little bit about my background, I mean, I grew up in a rent controlled apartment in Brooklyn. And now and then I have to pinch myself because it's really hard for me to believe the career I've had. And so I've always felt the need to give back, pay it forward to others.

Carrie Valiant:

And as you mentioned I think, I'm on ABGs board. But my community service at the firm started way back. I started the firm's formal pro bono program in the mid 2000's. And now I'm happy to say a majority of our attorneys participate in the program and provide pro bono services. So for instance, during the pandemic, lawyers from across our firm participated in a compassionate release project that helps vulnerable prisoners obtain early release from prison for health

purposes. I've had the firm's support to be active in nonprofit organizations that make the world a better place. So you mentioned WBL, which I'm on the board of. I also serve on the Board of Street Law, a nonprofit that promotes the rule of law and civic education for young people. And I was just elected vice chair of the board I'm proud to say.

Laurie McGraw:

Congratulations, Carrie. I mean, those are a lot of additional accomplishments beyond just what you're doing at the firm and the pro bono work. My goodness. I mean, if ever there was a time to need help and support for critical efforts across the country, over the course of this last year and for what we can anticipate, the future. That is fabulous. Congratulations on that. You mentioned that, just those additional things beyond just the work that you do were important to you in your career. Writing a book, serving on outside boards, starting programs whether within the firm or outside is really important to you. So, let's just talk about that. How do younger women, for example, find those opportunities and pursue them while still working very hard to build their careers in their day jobs?

Carrie Valiant:

Well, I think that is a challenge. I think one of the things that you just have to do is make time for it. I think in the legal profession the billable hour is [inaudible 00:08:28]. So if you are continually focused on having the highest hours, you often don't pay attention to other things that you should be doing to increase your visibility, and honestly to make your career interesting and fun. The client work is wonderful. It's challenging and it helps you to grow. But many of us feel that we have something else to give, and I think you don't get there if you don't make time for it. You can't just, and I know we're in a pandemic now and everybody's sitting at their computers, but as we come out of the pandemic there will be events to go to and opportunities. And you don't develop that kind of accomplishment and that kind of full career unless you get away from your desk. Look up every once in a while.

Laurie McGraw:

I agree with that. And I think that so many of the younger women that I speak to, they talked about this last year, the pandemic from a career perspective was almost a lost year in terms of having the opportunities to get out, network, develop. But your point of make time for it I think is a very, very good one. Let's talk about the DNI work that you do, diversity and inclusivity. You chair the committee for Epstein Becker Green. When did that start? What was it? I mean, everybody has those types of efforts it seems today. How long have you been doing it? Why did you start it? What have you been doing with it?

Carrie Valiant:

So I start our diversity committee. We've had a board level diversity committee for many years. And one of the things that I like to say about Epstein Becker Green is that we were diverse before it was cool to be diverse. So I think I was pleased to take it over and continue that march toward diversity and inclusion. I think this is an area that requires continuing time and intentionality to stay the course. I think the last year in particular with the George Floyd tragedy has been particularly challenging, and I think it's really important for allies like myself to stay engaged and committed to diversity and inclusion. Studies show that organizations that are

diverse are stronger for their diversity. They make better decisions, they're more profitable, and now the clients are demanding it. And so, I can't believe how many calls I've had with clients over the last six or eight months talking about what our diversity efforts are. So diversity to me is not just for diverse people. It's for everyone.

Laurie McGraw:

Thank you, Carrie. That is very interesting in terms of the committee being around for a long time. But as you say, it's a tremendous amount of attention on these efforts now. It's also very encouraging to hear that your clients are asking for it because nothing helps move things further faster when there are financial reasons for making something happen. That certainly something that I have seen over the course of my career. So what's different in terms of what you're doing today in this particular area than you might've been doing ahead of the past year of this pandemic, of this year of national unrest, social justice, which we've all been talking about. And I really do agree with you that this is an issue for everyone.

Carrie Valiant:

So I think we've stepped up in many ways, including some of the measurable ways that are out there. We are increasingly participating in surveys and other tools that measure diversity and inclusion. But it's beyond the numbers, right? It's also are people getting recognized and promoted? What are your policies in areas like maternity and paternity leave? And other benefits are they in the right place? And I think ultimately some of the question is are we providing a welcoming place where all people can feel valued and supported? And to me this was the piece that was hugely important last year. So following George Floyd's murder we held a number of virtual town halls for people to gather and share thoughts in a safe space. We also recently had a virtual Zoom conversation about anti-Asian violence. So we are doing our best to do what we call continuing the conversation on these issues. We also encourage people to participate in affinity groups. We have a minority attorneys forum that has become, as you might imagine, incredibly active this past year. And we have had a women's initiative for over 20 years. So I know it made a difference to me as a woman at the firm to have colleagues who were like me, and I think it's important for everyone to have that sort of welcoming community to grow and develop to their highest potential.

Laurie McGraw:

Yeah and those welcoming groups, those conversations, It's also interesting, sometimes difficult, sometimes helpful, sometimes both to have those in your place of work where you're bringing sort of your whole life into the professional conversations that has had a variety of results. I've certainly seen that in the work that I do professionally, and I also see that in terms of many other women that I speak to in terms of what they're doing. Where has it been challenging? Where have you tried certain things that haven't worked out so well and how did you adjust?

Carrie Valiant:

So that's interesting. I think there's always a fear when you stretch and try something new that it will flop. But I think I've been actually surprised in the last year that all of these new things that we've tried, while challenging, I think they've been fairly successful. I mean, not every meeting that we had was stress free, but I think that it helped to educate us. It helped us to focus on the

things that were important. And frankly, I heard things that were surprising to me about experiences that my colleagues had that they never talked about before and helped me to understand them better. And I think it helped to focus our attention on the things that are important.

Laurie McGraw:

Well you mentioned that the firm really stepped up its efforts even though there had been longstanding efforts in this area of DNI and certainly the women's initiative over the years. So how are you measuring yourself? How are you keeping yourself accountable that these efforts, that these conversations, safe spaces, are actually helping the firm in terms of the efforts, and helping the individuals in terms of they're both learning as well as professional development?

Carrie Valiant:

So there are a lot of organizations out there that are passionate about the issues of diversity and inclusion with respect to it generally as well as particular populations as well. They all have surveys. And their surveys over the years and the things that they ask us to measure and track have become, I guess they've stepped up as well, right? So we do our best to participate in as many of those surveys as possible. And it helps us to measure our accomplishments in that area. But as I said, not everything is numbers. It's also about promotion and making sure that you have a welcoming place. I also think that it's important. I mean, we're a healthcare firm. So I think it's important for us to think about how we can make a difference with respect to diversity and healthcare. And to me I think the next frontier of things to accomplish in this area is health equity.

Carrie Valiant:

And it's something that brings together my passion for healthcare, for diversity, for pro bono service. I've always felt and I've been interested in healthcare access for a long, long time. There's a lot about our healthcare system that's broken, but it seems to be even more broken for people of color. And I think the pandemic made that fairly apparent with disparities in access to COVID testing, and treatment, and now vaccines. Beyond COVID there are the stresses of being a person of color that make chronic diseases more likely. There are social determinants of health like access to housing and healthy food that exacerbate the situation. And then there's the fact that healthcare professionals are frequently biased when it comes to treatment. I mean, we saw that with women and heart disease a few decades ago. And now we're seeing it with how black people are treated. So there's literature that's emerging that black people don't get treated as aggressively as white people when they present with the same conditions. I was actually reading last night that some of the algorithms that health professionals rely on to prescribe treatment have a racial adjustment. It's like, "Wait, what?"

Laurie McGraw:

Yes, there's a lot to talk about there. And that's a very, very broad and critical topic. In terms of closing those health equity gaps, you are absolutely right that the pandemic simply laid them bare. And the efforts that you're taking that so many organizations should and need to be taking around these issues, it's urgent. I think that that is sort of like a bold underscore word that we need to really apply energy towards these efforts. But maybe Carrie, if we could just turn this

back to the conversation about women and helping women in terms of their career growth, because I feel like I don't have time to go into how to work those other large issues. Talk about mentoring women and what you've done over your time to really help women grow in their careers professionally.

Carrie Valiant:

Sure. So one of the things that we've done fairly recently in the last number of years is draw a distinction between mentoring and sponsorship. So mentoring is you'd get a sounding board, you'd get somebody to talk to. Sponsorship is about getting an advocate, getting somebody who will get you to the next level. And so our conversation the last few years has been much more in the area of who is it that we can sponsor to get to the next level. And I think one of the interesting things to me is that many of the people who were trying to sponsor women and people of color, I will say, some of them don't necessarily see their career trajectory in the same way that we do. And so often it's easy for people to lose confidence, to think they're not progressing. What I try to tell people is that a career is not a sprint, it's a marathon. And that although you may not be able to have it all at once, you definitely can have it over a long career.

Carrie Valiant:

I think in the past year that sort of mentorship and sponsorship has become really important in the pandemic year. Right? A lot of our women have been struggling with kids and families at home, much less outside help than they're used to. So I think to me the message that I've been trying to drive home is that just because you aren't making progress this minute, doesn't matter so much in a long career. Also, I think confidence is key. I think it's a hard thing to walk into a room and feel like you belong no matter what affirm does to promote inclusiveness. Right? So I encourage people to develop that voice in your head that says, "I know I'm valuable. I know I belong." Once you have that aha moment that you are making a contribution I think everything changes. You end up having the confidence to ask for what you want. And interestingly enough you usually get it. Right?

Laurie McGraw:

Those are such good pieces of advice. I like the advice on career growth is a marathon and not a sprint and how to focus on it during this time of the pandemic to think about the longterm. Carrie, this has been such an excellent conversation. I really appreciate your comments. Do you have any closing words of advice for women who are starting out, developing, and thinking about their career growth?

Carrie Valiant:

Definitely. So one of the things that I talk about as well is that people need to stay true to themselves. You know everybody's always going to tell you what they think you should do to be successful, but really you have to follow your own star. And that's ultimately what makes you successful. I think also that it's not only important to achieve for yourself, but to do what you can to develop and promote other women as well. And I think that's true at every point in your career that you can always walk into a room. The rooms we walk into these days still don't always have women who are leaders and certainly women of color who are leaders, right? So a lot of the rooms we walk into, especially on Zoom, right? You can see all the little boxes, and a lot of

those little boxes have too many men and are too white, right? So we all can look around, make a difference, see what we can do to recommend other women, other women of color, people of color to make the world a more diverse and inclusive place. As I said early on, this is everybody's issue and we all can make a difference.

Laurie McGraw:

Carrie, thank you so much for those great words of advice. I really appreciate it. This has been an Inspiring Women conversation with Carrie Valliant. And Carrie thank you so much.

Carrie Valiant:

Thank you, Laurie. It's so nice to be here. Thank you so much for having me.

Laurie McGraw:

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