GPSolo Podcasts – Brown Bag Series

Defining Moments: Insights into the Lawyer’s Soul
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Lynn Howell: Hello and welcome to the ABA GPSolo Podcast, our brown bag talk session today. My name is Lynn Howell, and I am the Chair of the GPSolo Programs Board. We’re kicking off today’s program.

Our presentation today is Defining Moments -- Insights Into the Lawyer’s Soul. The session is based on a recent ABA publication book authored by our Division Chair, Melanie Bragg. It serves as a roadmap for leadership and personal growth applicable to all audiences. Interviews by Melanie Bragg revealed that each lawyer has a (lead line) or success principle that he or she has lived by on their road to success.

This unique compilation is organizing and (derived on the) leadership model (consisting of) L for Legacy, E for Excellence, A for Authenticity, and D for Determination. Touching upon every aspect of our life, the lead lines are practical and inspiring principles that can take any aspiring person from where they are to where they want to be in life.

The stories are told by a wide range of lawyers, past ABA presidents, judges, big firm lawyers, small firm lawyers, non-practicing lawyers. And what they all have in common is their ultimate success was driven by their defining moments.

Now, let me tell you a little bit about Melanie. Melanie is obviously our current Chair of the Solo, Small Firm & General Practice Division. But in addition she's a very busy lawyer based in Houston, Texas, she’s been in practice since 1993, and she represents clients in everything that you can
imagine, but most of her focus has been those with business, real estate, elder
law issues, HIPAA. She is a renowned author. She has drafted -- and (the
success) author of the HIPAA for the General Practitioner, as well a (fiction
prior), with Crosstown Park, an Alex Stockton legal thriller. She is very active
in the National Speakers Association, and the National Speakers Association,
Houston.

At this point, it gives me great pleasure to introduce you, Melanie Bragg.
Melanie, would you welcome us, take this lead and tell us why you decided to
write the book?

Melanie Bragg: Lynn, one reason. I love you so much. I think you just added 10 years to my
life. I'm actually 10 years younger than I am, which is great. I started in ’82,
so -- but thank you. I love that youthful -- having that youthful vigor.

Yes, we finally got Defining Moments: Insights Into the Lawyer’s Soul out.
And you mean, to tell you where I got the idea?

Lynn Howell: Yes. Please, do.

Melanie Bragg: Yes. Well, I was sitting at a Jack Canfield Best Selling Authors Program in
2003. And I was looking at the list of all the Chicken Soup for Everybody’s
Soul books that he had done. And I’ve really -- I’ve met him as a result of
reading a story in the Chicken Soup for the Writer’s Soul book that I had.

And so I raised my hand in this little group of like 12 people, and I said, Jack,
how come you never did a Chicken Soup for the Lawyer’s Soul book? And he
stopped and he kind of looked up at the ceiling and he quipped so eloquently
as he always does. He says, well, wouldn’t that kind of be like that book,
What Men Know About Women, you open the pages and there’s nothing on
the page? And everybody laughed, everybody thought it was so funny. And it
took me a second to get it. I was like, oh, lawyers don’t have souls, that’s
right, OK.

And I thought about it later that evening. I was just kind of sitting there and
thinking, wait a second, lawyers do have souls. The lawyers that I’ve worked
with in the American Bar Association since my Young Lawyers Division
days, my Texas Young Lawyers Division days, my Houston Young Lawyers Division days, my Law Student Division of State Bar Texas days have been some of the most both philanthropic, giving, caring people that I’ve ever met. And that goes across party lines. It’s not Democrats or Republicans, it’s just human beings.

And we’ve always just worked together and painting a homeless kid’s place, or packing bags with the food bank, or all the different things that we do; packing boxes for the military like we’ve done this year. All of those things are -- have shown me that lawyers really care. And we are the brunt of a lot of jokes. We are the brunt of quips like Jack. He didn’t have a mean spirit when we did that. It was just funny, it really was funny. But what has happened since then is that was the seed where I said I want to do this book.

And so when I started, I really didn’t know exactly what I was doing, or how I was going to do it. When you interview people, you basically -- you get people talking about themselves. Pretty soon, you’ve got a 50-page transcript of childhood and college years and high school years.

People -- when I did these interviews, people remember things that they hadn’t even thought about in years. The people -- some of the interviewees told me, oh I don’t have anything to say, I'm not sure there would be anything interesting in my story. And what I realized is that everybody does have a story. Everybody’s story is very compelling and we could do a defining moments story on each and every one of us.

And what I'm hoping this book will do is that it will help the people who read it and the people who learn from it to think of their own defining moments and really shape their future with that. So that’s why I’ve created it the way I created it so that it could be partly a knowledge gaining and interesting read of interesting things. But I'm also hoping that people get more than that from about themselves.

Lynn Howell: OK. So you found out that we are more than chickens. (Inaudible) and you're helping us understand them.
But through all of these, you came up with the lead principles, the lead lines that you discerned that there were basics through all of these after you went -- or how many interviews did you do?

Melanie Bragg: About -- I think there’s 42 of them made it in the book. There’s a few of them didn’t make in the book.

It was really -- it was not easy to get people to be vulnerable. I mean, in other words, when they're being interviewed, it’s like they want to show all the good things that have happened to them and all the stuff that’s on their resume.

And I told one people that I interviewed, I said, excuse me, if this doesn’t stop sounding like a CNN Sound Bite interview, you're not going to make the book. I mean, it was to go deeper.

And so luckily, the way -- I was very inexperienced when I did the first interviews. But as I got better and better at it, so it was really a learning process. It was a journey for me to -- and learning how to get to the meat of the biscuit, how to get to the story, and how to cut through. Because all of the people that I interviewed -- if I had put in everything that was in their interview, some of it would have been not quite so interesting. But it would have also been an encyclopedia book. It would have been much, much bigger. So what I wanted to do was just wheedling it down to the nut of the biscuit and the reality of it was a challenge for me.

But I began to see that each one of these taglines or success principles -- I decided to call it a lead line because that is something a term of ours that we used in the law with leading questions, a lead line. And then whenever I did the acronym -- I love acronyms. They come really easy to me and they make it easy for me to learn.

When I thought about that, legacy is one that I really love because when we talk about legacy, a lot of times if you think about how much money someone leaves their children, or how much property, legacy is so much more than that. And legacy is something that is in each and every day. Just like when Judge
Brown, Pamila Brown went on that Girl Scout trip to get -- to get to go on that trip, she had to make it through lots and lots of applicants.

But when she went over there and she fell into the earth and she just smelled the dirt and the grass and she went, this is where I'm from, that she was breathing in the ground that her ancestors walked on, and that’s where she got that deep and abiding knowledge of who she was. So her life was changed forever by that. That’s the legacy -- that was the legacy of her ancestors passed on to her. But then the way she leaves her legacy.

So legacy is something that you do in each and every moment, just like the work that Artika Tyner does, Dr. Tyner does with her Justice for Children book, creating a superhero out of her own persona, and turning what she learned as a child about herself, being involved in books and stories to help her from being lonely, turning that into her legacy now with children each and every day.

So everything that we do each and every day is part of our legacy. So the more I work with this concept of the lead lines and the Legacy, Excellence, Authenticity and Determination, the more it really just fit.

Lynn Howell:  OK. So tell us some of the excellence that you encountered while you're interviewing.

Melanie Bragg: Yes. So, excellence, the main one on that one is Dennis Archer. Basically Dennis Archer said, be ethical, return calls, keep a clean desk. And I love that when he said that because it reminded me of when I walked into (Joe Dremail’s) office many years ago, I was lucky enough to get to be in (Garden of Latima), one of his cases. And when I walked into his office, I had the distinct -- there was just like no static, there was no -- I can't explain it. We humans are very perceptive, we’re very intuitive, and we pick up on things. And there was just such a clean air in his office.

And then I walked into his office and there was nothing on his desk. And he had a nice little couch, little coffee table area. And so I had the feeling that I was there for a meeting about what we were doing.
And he said to me, Miss Bragg, what do you want to do in this case? Now, I nearly flipped out inside. I was a young lawyer and I was like, (Mr. Dremail) is asking me what I -- he was showing me so much respect. So a man like that, a person like that, that endears confidence.

So what Dennis was saying, we talked about it, Dennis was saying, whenever you have a clean desk like that, it gives your client the idea that you are the only person, that you have the time to focus on their legal problems, and that you're not burdened down with a bunch of other things.

So just the little, the excellence -- excellence is in the details. Excellence is in how you execute things and how you do things. And for Dennis Archer, the cool thing about him is he came from very humble beginnings. They had a honeypot that they used. That’s an old fashioned term, but that’s before they had indoor plumbing. So if someone needs to go to the bathroom at night, they use the honeypot. So that’s where he came from to be the man who was appointed to the Michigan Supreme Court, the first African-American appointed to the Michigan Supreme Court, the Mayor of Michigan -- the Mayor of Detroit, and the first African-American president of the ABA.

He didn’t get there by not maintaining excellence in his life. And he was always just a really hard worker and luckily he had mentors who saw him. Most of us if we think about it have had mentors who help us along the way, and really just thinking about and pondering on what those mentors have done for us and how they’ve helped us, and how the people that have come in to our lives like Dennis, he didn’t even know that he was going to be a lawyer really. I mean, it didn’t even dawn on him. But he met a woman who is now his long-time beloved wife, who just kept saying you need to go to law school.

So Trudy has been someone who really, really -- she saw things in him that he didn’t even see in his self. But the while, he was doing it with excellence.

The other one that I really love is our dearly departed Bill -- no, not Bill, I forgot -- we forgot to mention -- OK, I'm looking at this -- Bill Robinson, OK -- make a positive difference in the lives you serve, that’s another legacy one that I wanted to touch on real quick.
Bill Robinson was going to -- he was going to go be a priest. And the priest, he wasn’t quite sure. The priest told him, look, if you don’t want to do this, then you’ll still have a great education, and you don’t have to become a priest at the end of all these.

But the thing that I loved about Bill in terms of his story was he really went on his intuition. His intuition was what guided him so much of his practice. And he talked about the elections he didn’t win, and the races that he lost. And he was like, how in the heck did I get to be the President of the American Bar Association? Well, he got there through his pursuit of excellence also, and he’s also relying on his intuition.

So everyone in this book really fits in more than one category. They're not all just the same category.

You want to hear about anybody else in the excellence category?

Lynn Howell: No. I think let’s roll over to authenticity, because that has a little bit wider range of (walks) of normal people. Excellence, yes, that’s all good, but what about (inaudible).

Melanie Bragg: Authenticity, well of course my favorite one, one of my favorite -- so that’s weird, they're all my favorites -- is that one find your voice because no one is going to give it to you, (Barbara Maiden). She graduated from law school in the mid-’70s and found herself at a big firm and going to all these meetings where there was these men’s clubs. And I remember going to those men’s clubs too. I was like one of the only women -- for many years in my practice, I was one of the only women on committees and meetings and things. And it was really a crazy time. But when she would arrive early, they would look at her and say, well, you’ll have to stand outside with your suitcase in the snow or in the rain. I mean, like, they wouldn’t break the rule even because of the weather.

And so she got tired of going in through the kitchen. She got tired of waiting out in the snow. And so finally, she just -- she waited around for someone to give her permission, and finally she just -- the next time that happened, she just marched right in that board room, slapped her briefcase up on -- sat at the
head of the table and said, listen boys, let’s get this meeting started. And they all just went, huh, kind of -- and then they all sat down and minded her.

So she realized, and in that moment that she just got to get -- she got to find her own voice because nobody is going to give it to you. So from that day forward. But she also had real tremendous fear of public speaking. I mean, people think it’s weird. I mean, I felt the same way before we were doing our awards luncheon Friday. I was just like, oh my god, I'm going to blow this, I'm not going to be able to make it. I mean, I speak all the time. But here I am, five minutes before just feeling like I'm going to mess it up for sure. So that’s human.

We’re all human no matter how experienced we get, or how famous, or how rich, or how -- whatever. We’re all just still at the core human. And (Barbara) felt the same way, except for when she was speaking about something she was passionate about. That’s when she really found her voice, too. So we should always go for our passion as well to get our voices.

Lynn Howell: Well, you're saying that, but most every day, you're not all that passionate. I mean, OK, we might be passionate to find the Diet Coke in the morning. That can be a great passion about 7:30 am, or for others, coffee.

But how do you -- for what you’ve learned during the (inaudible), I think they come to have that passion. (I don’t think they) (inaudible)

Melanie Bragg: Well, that is a really good question because it’s different for everyone and that’s kind of what we’ve been trying to focus on this year, is helping -- we see all these things -- we’re kind of veering into a whole another topic here. But with the mindfulness practices and the suicides of lawyers and the stress and the practice and happiness and the lack of retention rates and all these problems we were having. That’s where I'm hoping that I think that’s some of the people in my book where they have found their passion is in doing public service for others and doing good -- being connected to something that’s bigger than yourself.

Just like John Kralik -- I don’t know if you’ve read 365 Thank Yous. But the minute that book came out -- they published it under two different names.
They published it under 365 Thank Yous is one of the titles. But he’s a judge in California. And he wrote the book -- he have gone through really -- I was so proud of him whenever I read this book. I was like, I’ve got to get to know this guy. And now we’re friends, because I was so impressed by the fact that he told the truth about how stressful it is to be leading a law firm, how stressful it is whenever you’ve got a huge client that (leaves), how stressful it is when you don’t know every day from the next whether you're going to be able to make payroll, and whenever you get a divorce because you worked the long hours that you’ve worked, and when your children don’t really recognize you because you can't show up at the soccer games because you're working so much.

So what John did during that time is he decided that he haven’t been a very good friend, that he had been thinking about all the wrong thing, and he ends up writing a thank you note a day to some random person in his life. He wrote a thank you note every single day. And in the course of that date, by three or four -- so the book tracks his journey -- within three or four months, he started noticing huge shifts in his life and how he felt his depression was going away, he was more purposeful, some of his problems were getting resolved.

So just by the simple act of gratitude, so by incorporating, finding that passion -- and no one is going to give you your passion either. I mean, you’ve got to find your own passion. But by really -- and that’s what I'm hoping Defining Moments will cause people to look at these other stories and see for themselves, what are my defining moments. So I'm in a process of creating a workbook and some classes around this, some workshops around this so that I can help people define their own defining moments. And if they're not on track, if none of what they're doing every day, if it doesn’t line up with what they want, what they love, what gives them meaning, then they kind of need to move into some different areas. So I'm hoping that this will be just the beginning, the sharing of these stories.

And the other thing that happens, Lynn, and you know this, we look at other people -- we’re all human beings. We’re all just -- like anybody who tries to tell you they don’t have those same feelings and emotions, they're just not telling you the truth, because we all do.
But we look at these other people, oh well -- they have it because their dad was a judge, and they got in a big firm, they have -- they inherited it -- we talk everything up. We don’t really know what everybody else goes through. And so when you read these stories about these amazing people and you found out, oh, they didn’t get the judgeship they wanted, oh, they made a mistake.

I think Rocky Rodriguez, Raquel Rodriguez, one of my very best ABA friends, she had a great story. She’s the daughter of immigrants from Cuba, and her father was a lawyer in Cuba, but he wasn’t ever a lawyer in the States. So she grew up right in the middle of the heyday of politics and the whole Cuban Fidel Castro thing. And she went to law school, landed a great job at Greenberg Traurig and was working away and was working away on these foreclosures. She got put in the foreclosure department.

And she just -- she didn’t know that you could file the claim and still keep working on it. So she was waiting, and then she missed the deadline. And so because of that, that client fired the firm and moved on. And she didn’t even really know all the -- everything that had happened until she got her review, and it was there. And she was just devastated. She was just like, oh my god, she just thought the world had ended.

And then Mel Greenberg, from Greenberg Traurig -- Mel Greenberg who managed things by walking around and talking to people and encouraging them and he’s just a really great guy from what I hear, he kind of leaned up on the -- popped into her office and looked at her, leaned up against the door and said, do you think you’re the first lawyer who’s ever made a mistake? And she looks up and she’s kind of like, well this wasn’t a mistake I really wanted to make. I didn’t know I was making a mistake. But he just -- he gave her permission. He said, look, this happens, this happens to lawyers. You’re going to be OK.

And so all those things that we sometimes think are the end of the world -- we had this young lawyer who was a rock star, (Matt Thrall) guy who just got married last August. He got a great job with a great firm. He committed suicide a few months ago. Maybe he missed -- I had a good friend right out of
law school, (Tully Price), way back when. He missed the statute of limitations when he got the dream job and he blew a case right out and he shot himself because of it.

So all these things that sometimes we think are so devastating really, really aren’t that devastating. So really just need to hang in there, look at what Rocky has gone through and look at what she’s accomplished now.

And I just love her story about how she kept thinking -- she wanted one thing. She wanted this international thing. But then she kept being pulled in other directions. Life will sometimes pull you in different directions. Maybe you don’t get exactly what you think you want, but you get what you need. Because Rocky ended up being asked to be Jeb Bush’s general counsel and she served there the entire time he was governor.

So all kinds of twists and turns happen to us all in the course of life. It’s just that we have to not give up. We have to not think that it’s the end of the world, and realize that we’re in the same boat with a group of other people that are going through just exactly what we’re going through.

Lynn Howell: OK. So you had your authentic people. Now, you also had a group that (inaudible) determination. And so what do you believe makes it (inaudible) that category, what their story was ...

Melanie Bragg: All of us have to in a way -- I mean, I don’t think there’s anybody that walk on this planet that doesn’t have to be determined to do things.

I mean, when -- I look at these stories, too, I'm just so excited, I'm hoping that people will get as much out of these stories from these people that I do.

But Benes Aldana who’s now the President of the National Judicial College, he -- his parents immigrated to the States before he did. He stayed back with his grandparents for about three years. That was at a time when the States, we needed nurses and his mom was a nurses, and his dad was in the military. So they got to come first. So he was there without his parents. The family was split up for a while which has to be traumatic on a child.
But then when him and his brothers finally got to fly to the States to be with mom and dad when they were 10 years old, he’ll never forget that plane ride is like the beginning of a new life. And when he got to school though, guess what, he’s the only brown kid and he talks funny, he had to learn new language and everything. So him and his brother adapted to change by faking karate moves -- like everything they get off a bus and a bunch of guys are going to be beating them up, they would just pull a little karate, kung-fu move. They didn’t know karate at all. But they pulled those moves and got the boys to take them away.

But then Benes, he was at a new school and he decided to run for an office, and he overheard a boy saying, don’t worry about it, nobody is going to vote for him, nobody knows. Well, a lot of kids might have let that get them down, and say well maybe I shouldn’t do this. But Benes just went ahead and did it. He kind of channeled JFK in one of the speeches and he won. So he proceeded to win election after election.

Another little funny story about Benes as he got a little summer program and he wanted to be in this judges group, and he landed in this guy Bill Gates group. And he was like, I don’t want to be in this group. And he was in Bill Gates’ group.

And so looking back -- at the time, he thought he was in the wrong group. But looking back, he knows he was in the right group, but he learned a whole lot from that. So that was a good experience for him.

The other one that I think is very interesting is the system does work, Alan Yamamoto. Alan is a guy that’s just like you and I. I mean, he’s a solo practitioner, he’s done a very kind of work. But all of a sudden whenever the 9/11 terrorist was going on trial, he was going to represent himself, but of course he needed that counsel to advise him. So the judge appointed Alan to be his lawyer.

And so Alan spent a good part of -- two or three years, spending all day every day with one of the guys that was instrumental to the 9/11. And the thing that is so compelling about this story is that the terrorist guy was saying, oh,
they're going to kill me, they're going to kill me, you Americans just want blood, you all are going to kill me. I'm going to get the death penalty. He was sure that he was going to get the death penalty.

And so basically, Alan and him just talked all day long every day. They never talked about law, they never talked about the case. They just talked about other things.

But when he was convicted and his punishment was set at life imprisonment when he did not get to put to death, there was an exchange -- like a visual eyeball to eyeball exchange where Alan knew that -- he understood the system does work, the -- our democracy, our judicial system, our system of justice does work. He did not get put to death. And a lot of people may think that, oh well, he should have been put to death. But in this case, really it worked better because if he had been put to death, he would have been a martyr. This way, he just get -- he has to serve out a life sentence.

Scott LaBarre, the possibilities are limitless -- Scott LaBarre found out when he was in 4th grade he started having problems with his eyes, and he lost the vision in one eye. And then pretty soon he lost the vision in the other eye. And the very first night when he’s back home and his mom serves a spaghetti in a bowl, his like, mom, don’t do this, don’t make accommodations for me. And Scott is very adamant that if you want to say he’s a great guy, go ahead say he’s a great guy because he’s a great guy, not just because he’s blind.

So he has just overcome so many odds and he’s going to be our Secretary of our division soon. And he’s just an amazing man even when he’s blind.

So all of these stories that you’ll read in this section will show you that no matter what, no matter how dark it seems, a lot of times -- well I would just say, there’s treasure in the darkness there. There’s things -- sometimes, those dark periods contain the seeds of our greatness later on.

Lynn Howell: OK. So you had all of these inspiring and wonderful moments with these incredible people. And (that’s a lot). But as we go when you're writing a book, there are some times when it’s hard to keep going. How did you pick yourself past (inaudible) mark and all (inaudible)?
Melanie Bragg: Well, I mean, part of what was happening was that I did not know how to distill 50 pages into three pages. And I didn’t want to -- there was so much, I was almost overwhelmed because there was so many great stories.

Like with Kent Spence, Gerry Spence’s son, he was like a high school dropout. I mean, he -- and he was sitting around listening to his father and some lawyers talk about the Silkwood -- remember, the Karen Silkwood case, he was -- and he just -- he kind of got inspired just by -- when he was working on the -- building the painting and carpentry work and stuff, and he overheard them talking. And that inspired him to get through college. But then when he got his law degree, he flunk the Bar three times. I mean, talk about never giving up.

Lynn Howell: (Inaudible).

Melanie Bragg: Yes.

Lynn Howell: (Inaudible) to the families.

Melanie Bragg: Yes, it really does. And listen, that doesn’t mean you’re not going to be a good lawyer if you don’t pass the Bar. It’s something that happens.

But anyway, so basically what happened to me is I had a good friend at the National Speakers Association, Ed Robinson, and I was talking to him about this book. And he said to me, he said, Melanie, it’s really great to have all these interviews. But unless you have you have your leadership model in there that you can do things with -- and take it a step further, it’s -- that he was the one that inspired me to put it together.

The minute I put it together with the lead line, and then the legacy, excellence, authenticity and determination, all the stories just -- they just flew over into -- literally, almost just flew over into their little categories. And it was equal. It was like, at that time, I think I had 44, it was like 11, 11, 11, 11. I was like, this is weird. So it was almost as if it was setup to be.
And so when I finally just got a deadline, there’s nothing better than deadlines. As lawyers, we will procrastinate until the very bitter end. But it was something that needed to come out. And I just really thank the lawyers that are in this book for revealing parts of themselves that they didn’t really necessarily want to reveal sometimes.

Like (Robert Greg) kind of whispered to me recently, he said, I think you know a lot about all of us that we don’t know about each other. And I said, yes, that everybody else is (fixed) to know it too.

So it’s -- the more vulnerable you are, the more -- the thing is, the vulnerability and authenticity, some people need to be authentic to themselves. Like, if you're working in a job that you hate, and you're not really getting the joy, if you're not feeling that joy of practicing law and what it means to do good for your clients, then you may not be in the right job. You may need to -- there’s the self-awareness first, and then your ability to be confident enough to be vulnerable to others. It’s a really powerful -- a very powerful thing that happens to us as human beings.

And I just really think that -- I love the practice of law. I love being a lawyer. I think it’s the world’s greatest profession. So I know this book is kind of an ode to what’s great about us as lawyers, but also what’s human about us, too. So you kind of have to take the good, the bad, and the ugly.

Lynn Howell: Almost everyone has a (setup first), we all trying to hide the ugly. That’s very eminent on Facebook. Everyone is perfect there.

Melanie Bragg: I know. But I like -- I actually -- I like those fairy tales -- I like fairy tales, so I like seeing everyone’s graduations, their anniversaries. I like all that because we do see enough of the tough stuff. And it was really -- the other thing that really, Lynn, that was so important to me when I was doing this is -- OK, when I was sitting there recording these interviews and taking notes -- so I’ve got handwritten notes, I’ve got the recordings, I’ve got the transcripts. And while they were talking, whenever they said something that I related to, like something that I had experienced myself, my hand would go up, like -- no one
could see it, no -- that they didn’t know I was doing it, and my hand would go up. My hand would go up. My hand would go up.

And it was just so weird that so often -- I mean, I was getting to know friends so much more deeply. I mean, I didn’t -- I learned so many new things about everybody in the course of all that. And then of course for me, my story of never, ever give up, six weeks into my law practice or right after I started my practice, I got a terrible closed head injury. Well, who wants to pitch that? Hi, I'm Melanie Bragg, I just finished working my way through four years of college, three years of law school, one year as a briefing attorney. I’ve got a closed head injury, hire me as your lawyer. I mean, that really doesn’t play well as far as the story.

And then if you want to be a writer, if you want to publish books, that was a little bit of dashing of my dreams there.

But somehow, I was so dedicated to being a lawyer and doing it, I managed to find a grouping of cases, a type of case that I could do through the courts representing the judges and making sure that things were right for their cases, and I didn’t have to read and write to the extent that most lawyers do right off the bat. So I could just use my own common sense and my own skills, and that’s how I got into that kind of law, and I was really good at it, and so it sustained me.

And if I hadn’t had the judge who had a son that had a head injury, I mean, the judge knew that I was more damaged than I knew. I was completely unaware of my situation. Because I couldn’t afford to be aware of it because otherwise what would I do? Crawl up in a ball and say forget all these years of hard work just because I had this car accident? And I was like, no way, that’s not going to happen.

So I’ve got really lucky. It was about 8 and 10 years later, something happened. I did some physical therapy and my occipital bone popped back into place. And once that popped back into place, the spinal cord fluid was able to circulate regularly and all that kind of stuff, and I just -- I got my photographic memory back, I got my ability to retain information back, sort of
I'm losing some of it now, but that’s the -- it’s not a (blonde) moment, it’s a (Gerry) moment. I'm just kidding, I'm just kidding.

But the thing is I stuck with it, I didn’t give in to the bad thing, the circumstance that happened. So I hope that stories like that will encourage others with similar situations. I know that some of the law students out there now have lupus, or they have debilitating medical problems, and sometimes they may think that they can't go to law school to be lawyers. But I know I'm a prime example of that. So that’s kind of where I feel very grateful that I was able to continue to do what is my life purpose.

Lynn Howell: OK. So we also know that you're a fiction writer. And when you're doing (fiction book) and you’ve completed that, it’s been very successful, how did -- there were two different kinds of genres. As a writer, how did you (wrestle) with making sure that (inaudible) moments like no one (inaudible) and all that to (inaudible) to professional conduct?

Melanie Bragg: I can't hear you very well. What did you say?

Lynn Howell: OK. With your thriller, your legal thriller, Crosstown Park, that’s a very fictional book and wonderful. But in this book, it was more (authentic) writing work, telling real people’s stories. So as an author, how did you keep your separate kind of writing styles apart ...

Melanie Bragg: Well, it’s really not that hard. I mean, the main thing that anybody who wants to write is being an honor student, English student, making straight As in English in high school and having a good idea isn’t enough. You need to learn the craft. And there’s a craft for non-fiction writing, as well as a craft for fiction writing. And the craft for fiction writing is completely different than for non-fiction.

But if you instill the stories, it’s all about the stories. People love the stories. So what I love about Defining Moments is that it’s kind of a little bit of a crossover. It’s real, but there’s still stories. But then there’s so much teaching and learning.
But even in Crosstown Park, there’s a bunch of non-fiction hooks. There’s ways that you can teach from Crosstown Park different lessons about social justice, litigation, trial. I mean, so each book -- and it does take skill and it does -- it’s not something -- it’s something that I’ve invested a lot of time, money and energy into and learned from some of the best teachers. It’s not something I just do naturally. I mean, I put a lot of effort into it. So I think that’s what kind of makes the difference is what you're willing to put into it.

Lynn Howell: OK. What special things from this book -- I know we’ve talked about the advice and the special stories. But is there anything else that you really want with the pieces of information you want your readers to hold on to with (inaudible)?

Melanie Bragg: Right. What I wanted to hold on to, and I'm working on a workbook about this now, is to think back just to get in a quiet place, a quiet time, and just do some thinking and ask yourself a series of questions; when was I most happy? When I was a little girl, I always had a (pen handy) -- because I always had ideas I want to write down, OK. And I had a little spiral notebook and I had a book. I was never caught without a book. The word boredom never entered my vocabulary. I mean, basically what the adults were doing was pretty boring to me, so I would read my book.

My friends and my cousins especially, would kind of get mad at me. Sometimes they’d be like, they wanted me to play with them and sometimes I prefer to read the book than play with people. But that’s who I was as a little girl.

So am I happiest whenever I'm in a book, at a book signing, or in a library, or when I'm working on that? Yes, because that’s who I am.

When I moved, when my parents got divorced at the middle of 3rd grade, and I had to go to a new school, the library, I mean I still remember I can almost crawl up and be back in that little library where I read these books on the first ladies. So I’ve actually got a series of children’s books that I want to do that I think would be really helping, teaching a lot of cool stuff to kids.
But anyway, I read the autobiographies of the first ladies; Abigail Adams, Jane Addams, Dolly Madison, Eleanor Roosevelt. And I think that reading those books at that time of my life is kind of what inspired me also to become a strong woman lawyer, to become a brave, strong woman.

So I want people to think about what are they happiest doing, where do you find your most joy, and try to do more of that. And then the things that you can delegate -- I mean, I know us Solos, we do not delegate enough. There are things that other people can do and they may not do it exactly the way we do it. But if it gets done, who cares? We don’t have to micromanage everything.

So I'm going to be doing some work in this area, getting things ready to be able to help people find out what their defining moments are and what -- those are the keys to unlocking some of the situations that they have so that they can have -- I mean, all day, every day is not going to be perfect.

But if you wake up in the morning and you want to get to the office and you can't wait to get there, and then when you -- when it’s time to go home and you're wanting to go home because you're happy with what’s (this) -- that’s what the CEO of LinkedIn said, is that I get up every day dying to get to the office, and I leave every day dying to get home. And that’s kind of what we want. It’s not all perfect. But if it’s not where you want it to be, I think doing some of these defining moments work will lead us into more of what we want and less of what we don’t want.

Lynn Howell: OK. Well, thank you.

All right, operator, could you give the instruction in case we have any questions from our listeners today?

Operator: Sure, ma’am. At this time, I would like to remind everyone, in order to ask a question, you may press star-one then the one -- star then the number one on your telephone keypad. Again, that’s star, then the number one on your telephone keypad.
Lynn Howell: Thank you. Now, while we're waiting to see if we have any online questions, I want to ask you what in all of these do you want -- what impact do you want or most to have ...


Lynn Howell: What impact do you want your book to have?

Melanie Bragg: Well, I would like for the people who read it to be like, yes, nailed it, that’s a cool story. Well, I want to read another one.

I mean, each one of these stories is kind of like a piece of chewing gum. You can chew it and then if the flavor goes out and then you want another piece -- have you ever done that with bubblegum, you have one piece and then the flavor goes out and you add another piece. Pretty soon, you’ve got three to four pieces of bubblegum in your mouth before you spit it out and start all over. At least that’s how I did it.

But there was a book called You’ve GOT to Read This Book! And GOT was capitalized. And it was a book about books that people like. It was like a series of essays where people shared what the book, their favorite book was. And so you could read it. And if you read the book, you share it. If you didn’t read the book, you were like, wanting to read the book.

Well, I kind of tailored these stories as to that type of book. And from what I'm hearing from people that have read it, they were like, Melanie, I just sat down to read one or two and I couldn’t stop reading and I finished the whole thing. And you could read it like in two to three hours. It’s not like it’s going to take that long.

But I want it to be the kind of thing where you finished -- you look at the clock, you say I need to go to bed, one more story, one more story, one more story. And pretty soon, you’ve read them all. And I'm getting that kind of feedback now so I'm just really excited about it.

And I would like for non-lawyers that read it to understand their lawyer relative -- Arvin Maskin bought seven of them and he’s given them to all of
his children and he really wants to spread the word. It’s kind of like, see, this is what I go through; see, this is why I do what I do. Because a lot of the times, people don’t really understand why do you have to be Chair of the GPSolo, you're not making any money from that, you're not -- what is it doing for you, why do you want to be President of the Houston Bar Association, why do you want to be on the Texas Young Lawyers Board.

People are always coming up to us and -- we do this stuff not really -- I don’t really think it’s for our own personal gain. I think we do it because we can't do anything else, and that’s really like what Joseph Campbell talks about the Hero’s Journey.

So I really feel like I wanted to uplift the -- if I could have anything I want, you ask, I would want it to enhance the reputation of lawyers and among the public just to realize that we’re real people too, and everything just doesn’t always go smoothly for us, but that we’re super hard workers and super dedicated and doing a lot of good in the world.

I want people to know that the American Bar Association is an amazing organization that does give value to its members, and that the relationships -- Lynn, when were at the Yankees’ game on Saturday, we had a young lawyer, and I can't pronounce her name correctly, (Steve) might know who she is. But she’s a young lawyer and she’s really, really sweet. This was her very first meeting.

And she came up to me and she said, oh, you made me cry at the awards luncheon. And I said, oh, really, I made you cry? And she said, yes, it was just so touching, your friendship with Mr. Anderson. And she said, this is my first meeting, but I’m hoping that someday in a few years that I’ll be able to have those kinds of friendships. I want to make friends.

And I really -- I looked at that and I thought, that is so cool, because we got to -- by just showing -- by showing by example our level of friendship with each other as a result of the bar work we do together was inspiring for young lawyer to make her want to get involved and make those kind of friendships.
I mean, some of these people in the book are I’ve been friends with them for 30 years. But did I know all the stuff about them that I wrote about? No. Had I gotten to know them as deeply? So that’s another thing. Maybe we need to get to know each other on a deeper -- more deep level than we -- than we have regularly. So that’s something that -- I can think of a lot of good things that can come out of reading this book.

Lynn Howell: OK. Thank you, Melanie.

Melanie Bragg: Have I -- have I convinced you? Have I convinced you?

Lynn Howell: You're getting there; you're getting there.

Melanie, let’s see -- first, I’ve got to know, operator, do we have any questions?

Operator: We don’t have questions over the phone. Presenters, you may continue.

Lynn Howell: All right, Melanie, the time is winding down, and I know you and I could talk for days.

Melanie Bragg: We do. We talk for days all the time.

Lynn Howell: I know we do. So I have to ...

Melanie Bragg: Lynn, let me ask you -- can I ask you a question? Can you share one of your defining moments? Because I know you’ve got a lot of them.

Lynn Howell: I’ve had a lot of them. Probably when I have to learn that my boss was dying of cancer. That was kind of hard because all of a sudden you have to step up, and (get my former students through it). You didn’t have a choice. You wanted to ...

Melanie Bragg: Yes, in those moments when there’s no other choice. So what did you do?

Lynn Howell: Stood up. Got them through it. There was no way around it. You had to take your private moment and cry, move on, get over everybody dressed up, and
ready for the celebration of life. And meanwhile, get students certified (and for graduation) all at the same time. (It was very, very)...

Melanie Bragg: Yes, isn’t it funny how we -- how we do -- when we’re called to do that, somehow we miraculously do it?

Lynn Howell: Yes, we do. It’s not always easy. But we managed to pull it off.

Melanie Bragg: Do you want to tell people how they can buy the book?

Lynn Howell: Yes. (I'm going to ask) -- let’s see, where do we get the book besides (inaudible)? (Shopamericabar.org) is where we can get the book.

Melanie Bragg: And it’s also on Amazon, too. All you have to do is just Google my name.

And yes, that young girl that I was talking about, her name was (Sumie Parks) and she was a young lawyer who joined us for the very first time this weekend. And I was very encouraged by her, and just excited, excited about the possibilities that we have before us.

But yes, the book's on Amazon and it’s on the ABA web store. And I will -- if anybody that wants to buy it and if they shoot me an e-mail at Melanie@melaniebragg.com, I can send them an autographed -- it’s a -- it's a sticker that they can put in their book and they can have an autographed book.

Lynn Howell: OK. All right, well it’s time to close the session today. And I would like to thank everyone as well as Melanie for a wonderful program.

Now this podcast will be available on our Web Site within a few days at ambar.org/podcast. Also, the book is available for purchase as we are discussing in the ABA book store at (http://merchantshop.americanbar.org). If you're not a member of GPSolo, we hope you (enjoy the division) especially since our membership is now free for ABA members.

Again, we thank you and have a wonderful day.

Melanie Bragg: Thank you, Lynn.
Lynn Howell: All right. Thank you, all, bye.

Melanie Bragg: OK. Bye-bye.