

## **William & Lonsdale – Lives in The Law**

### **Ep 19. Genevieve Collins**

**Voiceover** [00:00:04] This is William and Lonsdale, a podcast about the legal eco system in Victoria and the fascinating people and stories that make it tick today, your host, Michael Green speaks with lawyer Genevieve Collins about her life in the law. By her own admission, leadership was never something Genevieve aspired to despite this, since she began her articles at Lander and Rogers 35 years ago. She has been practice group leader for 13 years, chair of the board for four years, and is now the chief executive partner. As many of our listeners will know, management and leadership skills are not taught as part of a law degree and at a firm made up of equity partners, leadership requires a quite specific set of skills,

**Genevieve Collins** [00:00:44] I think in an organization, a listed company, not a partnership, there's the conventional leadership style, which is really hierarchical, essentially command and control. I would say, in a partnership of equals, there is a really complex leadership dynamic and it is as much about having a vision, building consensus and constantly negotiating and essentially politically maneuvering. Sometimes I think I'm the chief political partner, not the chief executive partner.

**Michael Green** [00:01:37] Good morning, Genevieve. Welcome to Lives in the Law and thank you very much for coming along this morning.

**Genevieve Collins** [00:01:42] Thank you, Michael. I'm delighted to be here.

**Michael Green** [00:01:45] Now, let's go back to the start to your childhood. You had a mother who seemed to have a strong influence upon you and upon your siblings as well. What was your mother like?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:01:54] Mum was proud, I think, bright. She was very bright. And she had a very strong sense of the importance of education. She felt keenly that she wasn't given the opportunity to study medicine that she would have liked to do. And I think that informed how she raised her children. So, there was this amazing silent, never spoken, but absolutely clear, crystal clear expectation that we would all excel. So, in our house, we had no rules. I remember growing up at school, I would always be the girl that could go to school the next day and fill in the latest episode of number 96, which was a kind of risqué movie in those days. We had no curfews, no bedtime, mandatory, anything like that. But the expectation of mum, supported by her belief that her three children were the cleverest people in the world, was that we would do medicine or law. And there was no choice, really.

**Michael Green** [00:02:51] And I assume you think it was a great benefit, having had that mother?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:02:55] I think so. It was empowering. It was very empowering, Michael. And I think I have seen through my life in different situations, including at my particular school, the power of putting someone in a position where they can thrive and believing in them. It's a very powerful gift, I think, to give someone else.

**Michael Green** [00:03:17] You mentioned your school. You were taught by the nuns at Sacre-Coeur Convent and Kildara convent here in Melbourne. What about the women who

taught you those nuns who had given up their life to a particular brand of service? What influence did they have upon you?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:03:33] I think they were all extremely influential and perhaps I did not appreciate it at the time, but they really were... The nuns were the first feminists. They were leaders in their field. They held all the leadership positions in the schools, in the hospitals, etc. and there was never any sense that it was gender based. The nuns thought you could achieve anything. There were no excuses. But I think coupled with that, what I've taken from the influence of the nuns is a sense of grounding, that there are always going to be people who were better at something and worse at something than you are. So, what you need to do is concentrate on bringing your best gifts to any situation or opportunity. And I think that reflected the way Mum brought us up too.

**Michael Green** [00:04:15] What a wonderful start you have with that mother and those women teaching you. You get through school successfully. Your vice-captain of Kildara in your year 12, you are accepted into Melbourne University to do law arts. But after two years at the university, you take a quite dramatic turn away from university and you join the Brigidine order of nuns. Why was that?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:04:35] So I didn't actually leave law. I still continue doing law. But yes, I did start law arts. That was basically my brother and my older brother Sean and my younger sister Gabriel did medicine. I did law. And my plan was that after two years of doing the first compulsory component of that degree, that I would then swap to social work. Instead, I didn't do that. I decided when I was 19, so third year uni that I would join the Brigidine nuns. And it's interesting, I guess, looking back at that, why I did that, there's lots of reasons, to be honest. I think I really did admire them, the kind of sense of service, this sense of obligation, perhaps, rather than entitlement. And I think there was a bit of romance to it. I think in those days, girls that went to Catholic schools at least contemplated being a nun at some stage. I just went through with it for a year, but I still continued law at the same time.

**Michael Green** [00:05:31] In hindsight, do you regret that year you spent with the Brigidine?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:05:35] Absolutely not. No regret at all. They were wonderful women. They dedicated their lives. You've referred before to service a particular kind of service. They were passionate about what they believed in. They were brave. They were pioneers. And I think the motto of the Brigidine to strength and kindness. And I still think if you adopt those two characteristics in your life, you can't go too far wrong.

**Michael Green** [00:06:00] After 12 months with the Brigidine, you decide it's not for you and you come back to uni to complete your arts degree and then you move on to your law degree. And at this stage, you say that something clicked for you and that law was it. What was it that brought about this understanding that law was for you?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:06:18] So by that stage in the third year, I'd finished the first three years of law arts and then the last two years of the degree were straight law. I think, look, first the first thing is I think I actually got the knack of it. I didn't do legal studies at school, so I finally got the knack of how to answer a legal problem. So, I became a little more enjoyable. But more importantly than that, I began to see the point of it. So, one of the things I did with a group of other students was go to visit the kids at Poplar House at Turana Youth Training Center, which was quite confronting, and hear about their

experiences in life and see, I guess, the point of law. And I also worked as a volunteer at Fitzroy Legal Service so I could see the benefit of actually being able to assist people with what were essentially everyday problems related to their life with an element of law in it.

**Michael Green** [00:07:08] You finish your degree, you finish your degree successfully. And then in those days you had to find articles or graduate traineeship I think it's called today, not by good management, but by good luck. You had articles, at Lander and Rodgers and you've said that they were great articles. I've often heard people over the years in the law and in these podcasts talk about great articles and also bad articles. What does it mean? What are great articles?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:07:32] For me, great articles, the key to it all was the people. So, I worked with some wonderful people, at Lander and Rogers. I had a fantastic supervisor who taught me a lot. I had wonderful mentors, formal and informal. I enjoyed the people I worked with. We were given pretty much free reign in those days at the Accident Compensation Tribunal because I was put into worker's compensation. I didn't actually know what it was. It was not a subject at uni, but nevertheless, that was what I was put into and I did it. And the Accident Compensation Tribunal gave right of appearance to article clerks in a way that none of the other courts did. So, we would be on our feet every day doing preliminary kind of mentions and directions hearings. And it was just really good experience. We were given access to clients and there was certainly a sense of having fun and an ability to try and fail. There was no sense that you had to get it right all the time. So, it was a very safe environment and I think it was an environment in which many of us, at Landers thrived.

**Michael Green** [00:08:39] And so they trusted you and gave you responsibility?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:08:42] They did trust us. Yes. And they did give us responsibility. And we had fun along the way. And I loved going to court. And, you know, there were I had my fair share of getting told off by judges for breaching basic etiquette rules that I was unaware of. We all did. But the barristers, too, were fun. It was really it was a wonderful time. I look back on those days very fondly

**Michael Green** [00:09:05] in these great articles Genevieve. Were there particular people who were helpful to you, who mentored you, who created a path for you?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:09:13] There certainly were, Michael. I think I was actually formally articulated to Harry Curtis, who was the senior partner at Lander and Rogers. Harry was a very smart black letter lawyer with a wonderful, wicked sense of humor and a quirkiness that made work fun. But I also had other supervisors that I think... My supervising partner, Peter Atkinson, was extremely influential. He brought a sense of humor to everything and also a sense of belief. Very similar to my experience with originally my mother and then the wonderful nuns that taught me at school. And I think that belief in you enabled you to double down on your strengths and be the best that you could be. And I also had the advantage of strong relationships with some barristers in those early days who used to say to me, look, if you're not aggressive or a loudmouth extrovert, as many lawyers were, don't pretend that you are, just be who you are, be authentic. And that has always resonated with me and is something that I encourage in others.

**Michael Green** [00:10:15] That degree of freedom, it seems that you had in your articles with the partners at Landers and with the barristers in today's more structured legal world

and more structured legal firms have a graduate trainee given the same sort of freedom to find out who they are and how they best work?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:10:32] I think that's a really good question. And the larger an organization gets, I think the harder it is. What they do have the advantage of now is rotating through different groups and we do work very hard to ensure that they're given access to clients, access to litigation, as well as advisory work, and also actually access to legal technology work that we do. So, we have a more formal mentoring structure than we did, and everyone does have a mentor as well as a supervisor. And there's also formal training that supplements that. But it is something that you have to be really aware of. And I think in this new hybrid flex working environment, concentrating on how we can deliver the best learning experience is something that we have to continue to adapt with.

**Michael Green** [00:11:19] So back to your story. You're assigned to the workers compensation team. You're acting for insurance companies. Were you happy with that? I mean, this is not like the Fitzroy Legal Service. This is not like Turana. This is acting for large corporations. Did it satisfy you doing worker's compensation work on behalf of insurance companies? What did you learn from it? What skills did you gather from doing that sort of work?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:11:40] It's a good point because I was on the other side and in those days, it was very political, politically partisan. You either worked for defendants or you work for plaintiffs. And I'd landed somehow rather, in a defendant firm. I think the issue for me was that I very quickly realized the law is about people and using skills in relation to intuition, understanding what your opponents, what's driving them, what's driving the plaintiffs, what the expectations are from clients. I think it really developed those skills of being able to read people and realizing that there's always two sides to every story.

**Michael Green** [00:12:16] And you have said that insurers play obviously a vital part in our compensation system to ensure that the people are paid what they're properly entitled to.

**Genevieve Collins** [00:12:25] Yes, and I was lucky at Lander and Rogers, Peter Atkinson was very strong in this belief that it was necessary to preserve the integrity of the scheme for those properly entitled to it. It was necessary to do really good work to ensure benefits were delivered early to the right people. And if there was a fight to be had that you would fight that issue to the best of your ability. And I think that that is definitely part of this sense of fairness, because the scheme is only viable, I think, if the right people are awarded the right amount. And I think what you're getting at is that there needs to be a purpose to something. Otherwise, it's very hard to get out of bed every day, continue doing what you're doing.

**Michael Green** [00:13:02] And it's got an important social purpose. Our workers comp scheme, I, I believe in that myself and I believe the insurance side of it play a very important role in us having a well-run scheme which supports our community.

**Genevieve Collins** [00:13:15] Absolutely. I totally agree with that. I think the other thing, though, in that accident compensation world, I think you learn skills around persuasion, influence, and those skills are very necessary, I think, and have stood me in good stead in the roles that I subsequently found myself in.

**Michael Green** [00:13:34] So by 30 you're a partner there at Lander and Rogers, but there's a little niggle still, it seems to do with religion or spirituality because you start a bachelor of theology.

**Genevieve Collins** [00:13:44] Yes, I did.

**Michael Green** [00:13:45] How did that all work out?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:13:46] So at about age, at exactly age 30, I decided that I really needed to apply in my own mind some academic rigor to this niggling spirituality, which I probably never truly unpicked. So, I looked around and at that time, the United Faculty of Theology at Melbourne Uni was offering a Bachelor of Theology, and that was the college for Training for Anglican ministers, Uniting Church ministers and the Jesuits who were sent nationally to Melbourne. You need to do their theology training. So, I started that degree and it was incredibly interesting and actually very satisfying.

**Michael Green** [00:14:27] Did you finish the degree?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:14:28] No, I didn't finish the degree. I completed three years of it. And by the third year, I had actually met my husband, who was a part student and a part tutor during that in The Bachelor of Theology, he was, in fact, a trainee Jesuit. So, I didn't feel that I could continue at that time. It was slightly controversial, unexpected and controversial, I think. And I thought it was best to stop that. In many ways, I regret not completing it.

**Michael Green** [00:14:56] Still time, Genevieve. So, you become the first female equity partner at Lander and Rogers. For those who aren't familiar with the workings of legal firms, particularly large legal firms. Could you tell us what an equity partner is? And are there other sorts of partners who are not equity partners?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:15:12] Yes. So, an equity partner is an owner of the firm. I think that's the clearest way to describe it. Most private law firms also have fixed share partners who don't own the business, but they are remunerated with a fixed share of the profits.

**Michael Green** [00:15:27] And so an equity partner gets a percentage of the profits based on how much ownership that partner has in the business or in the firm?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:15:35] Exactly. And there's usually an expectation that they buy what we call buy in. So, contribute working capital to the running of the firm at the beginning of their partnership.

**Michael Green** [00:15:46] So you're an equity partner. Soon after that, you have two sons. Back then, in the 90s, mid 90s, how did firms and in this case Lander and Rogers, accommodate equity partners, members of the firm having children maternity leave payment during maternity leave? What was done?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:16:01] That's an interesting question. So, at the time, I was the only female in the equity partnership and I was told by the senior commercial partner that there was no provision in the partnership agreement for parental leave. They did agree to give me time off work, which was good. I thought, though, a reasonable, reasonable approach would be to ask that the firm cover the interest on the working capital that I had paid in at the beginning of my partnership. So not expecting any actual parental leave

payment, but just that the firm would cover the interest on the working capital, given that they were continuing to earn money from the working capital. While I was on maternity leave, I thought that seemed a reasonable approach. But no, the partner at the time said to me that the closest comparison in the partnership agreement that he could find was the sick leave provisions, but that my predicament was voluntary. So, no, I didn't receive any parental leave in terms of money.

**Michael Green** [00:16:57] Now you talk about them paying you interest on your investment into the firm. Interest rates in those days, I assume, are probably like one or two per cent like they are today?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:17:07] Yes, funny about that, because I actually remember there were 17 per cent, so it was a rather substantial amount of money.

**Michael Green** [00:17:14] I find it that almost draconian, that point of view, even in the mid 90s myself. But you stayed. You must have been a bit irritated by the attitude they took or maybe more than irritated. But you stayed.

**Genevieve Collins** [00:17:26] I did. My girlfriend at the time was the solicitor advising the Equal Opportunities Commissioner who'd just been appointed. She knew and I knew. We both we both knew that approach was illegal and that the Equal Opportunities legislation did, in fact, apply to partnerships. But I did say it was I never considered not to. I was certainly not tempted to leave. For me, it was never about the money. I think it was always about the principle. But having said that, it was always something I was determined to fix. So now I'm happy to say at Landers, we have, I think, very generous parental leave provisions which also apply to partners, including equity partners.

**Michael Green** [00:17:59] And male partners?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:18:01] Absolutely. So, it's gender neutral. So, we have 22 weeks of fully paid parental leave, which is at the higher end. We also pay, as of recently, superannuation on any unpaid period during the leave. It's accessible without any set period of service.

**Michael Green** [00:18:17] So if I joined Landers today and then in a month's time, I need to take parental leave, I get the benefits.

**Genevieve Collins** [00:18:25] Yes, you could access the paid leave. There's a sliding scale. But there's I think the commencement point would be 14 weeks of paid leave and then the other entitlements would follow. And the other thing we've done, I think, which has been very significant for us, is that we have made the paid period accessible within 12 months from birth. So, it used to be that the paid period would immediately follow birth or adoption. And that meant in practice that it was the women who were accessing the paid component. But by just tweaking it in that way, we've found that partners, when their wives or spouses go back to work after the initial six months, can then in their turn, the Lander's partners or the Lander's people can then access the paid period of leave. And there's nothing like allowing someone else to walk in your shoes and experience what it's like to be absent from clients and practice for a period of time and then to come back. And we found that very powerful.

**Michael Green** [00:19:19] Are you aware if other large firms like Landers have similar policies? I mean, I'm really, I'm interested to know across the profession, is this commonplace now for parental leave?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:19:30] I would say that some of the firms have some of those benefits. I think that from my conversations with other managing partners, these provisions are very generous and comprehensive.

**Voiceover** [00:19:43] Lives in the Law is proudly sponsored by City Maps Illustrated. Their recent publication, The Melbourne Map, is a celebration of our wonderful city. This stunning hand drawn illustration, which took more than three years to create, is available as an art print, jigsaw puzzle and calendar. The perfect acquisition for your home office or corporate gifting. More information can be found on their website, [themelbournemap.com.au](http://themelbournemap.com.au).

**Michael Green** [00:20:11] Now, as of this moment, you are the chief executive managing partner of Lander and Rogers. You were previously practice group leader of workers compensation for 13 years. And for five of those years you were the chair of the board. In large legal firms how do these appointments come about?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:20:28] I would say more by accident than design, to be honest. I do think that. So, I became practice group leader in accident comp or compensation law, as we called it, when the previous senior partner, Peter Atkinson, retired. And so, there was no magic. It was almost a next in line situation, which is interesting because you take on those positions and you're not really trained for them. It's got nothing to do with whether you're a good lawyer. It's got nothing to do with whether you're good with clients. It's a whole new ballgame. And I think we're getting better at upskilling people. But it is an issue when one first is put in those positions. In relation to the board, the board is an elected position at Landers so equity partners can stand for an election. You are appointed for three years and then as a board, those five partners that are non-executive external director will vote. And so that's how I became chair of the board.

**Michael Green** [00:21:22] But what about chief executive managing partner?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:21:25] Yes. So, I became the C.P. three years ago. I was asked to put my name forward for that role. I said no, I didn't think... There're certain things about the role that I don't really like. I appreciate it's a wonderful privilege and there's so many opportunities. But I do not like being the center of attention. I do not like public speaking. I am required to do quite a lot of that. So, I guess that initially put me off. Having said that, I accepted the role. I was elected into that role for four years and I realize what an utter privilege it is to be in this position and how much you can do to assist other people in their roles within the firm as well as clients as well as communities do really important things.

**Michael Green** [00:22:08] And we'll get on to some of those important things that are done within the firm and externally. But I just like to touch on the subject of leadership of your appointed practice group leader, workers compensation. Just, maybe just is an unfair word, but just being a practicing lawyer, you had no experience in leadership, there was no training for you how to be practice group leader. So how did you tackle that job?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:22:30] Look, quite honestly, it was at first blush, it was rather terrifying because I inherited a wonderful team of lawyers. I had very senior to very junior lawyers. And some of those lawyers were more senior than me. Some were definitely

brighter than me. They had more experience than I did. And I wondered how we were going to come together as a really high functioning team. One of the things at that time we were told by a significant client was that we were a team of champions, but we were not a champion team. We were not functioning together. And at the time, I had the good fortune to hearing an interview with Dr. Martin Seligman, who's a positive psychologist from the University of Pennsylvania. And he had come at that time to work with Geelong Grammar and train the staff in positive psychology over a six month period. So, I made a point of attending every seminar I could that he spoke at, and I became very interested and did a lot of reading in positive psychology. And so, what we did was we had essentially a 360 degree instrument done on each of us, but only in relation to our positive traits. So, in other words, it was a strength based assessment tool. And we then talked about what we each thought were each other's strengths. And it was such a powerful realization, because I think too often lawyers are expected or certainly practicing solicitors are expected to be good at everything. They're expected to be good with clients, good at the law, good at supervising, mentoring, etc. And the reality is no one is good at all of those things. So, what we did was we then put ourselves in roles where we were doing things that we liked and doubling down on those strengths enabled everybody to be in a position where they thrived. And I recall one of the seniors very clever lawyers saying to me he was so grateful that he had been stripped of all the things he didn't like to do, given only the things he did like to do. And it freed him up to be the best black letter lawyer he could be.

**Michael Green** [00:24:32] In doing that, you didn't run the risk of there being a gap, i.e., we all like doing four fifths of the work, but that final one with all of us in common don't like and therefore there's no one has put the hand up and says, I love doing costing.

**Genevieve Collins** [00:24:46] It's a risk, but it didn't come to pass in that way at all because I think within a team of a certain size, there are always people who like doing everything, even down to something as detailed as mentoring. Some people are really good at mentoring and supervising young lawyers, and they will bring them through in a very formal, structured way. Other people hate having responsibility for supervising younger lawyers and going through marking, checking advices, et cetera. But what they are happy to do is to do doorstep technical advice. So, they're very happy to be essentially a help desk as a technical adviser without the actual responsibility for the lawyer. And there's always people that fill each of those roles. Just like I'll come back to a sporting analogy for you; in a football team, everybody has to be put in their correct positions and then collectively and together, you can have a successful high performing team.

**Michael Green** [00:25:32] Just pursuing that idea. The football analogy, football teams look at their team and say, well, we need this certain sort of player, so let's try and recruit a particular person with physical characteristics and physical abilities. In your recruiting now, do you look to recruit people who might fill the gaps in the firm?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:25:51] I think we certainly do. For me, it's really a question about interest. We have young grads and seasonal, which are our main recruit. We do recruit obviously some lateral more senior lawyers, but mainly we bring people through first as seasonal clerks and then as grads. And we are interested in their particular interests, whether that be law tech or something else in our particular legal service lines. I think it's really important.

**Michael Green** [00:26:21] Among the changes you've implemented in your time in leadership has been something called the wellness committee. What is it? And I particularly said, why did you think it was needed?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:26:30] Yes. So, the wellness committee at Landers we established about 15 years ago. Look, it was partly, I guess, in response to my interest in positive psychology. But as we know, lawyers have very high rates of mental illness. It's I think that's attributable to all sorts of things, including the adversarial nature of what we do, the six minute billable units and the constant pressure to achieve in terms of fees and performance in that way. So, we began to develop programs that were really relevant to Landers. I'm not talking about actually preventing people who have significant mental illness. I'm talking about keeping people that are, well, keeping them well. But I think the beauty of the wellness committee is that we have continue to adapt. So recently with covid when parents, for example, were home schooling and becoming stressed in that environment, trying to juggle everything. We had a guest speaker from the University of Melbourne who's actually a positive psychologist in children's education, and she spoke not just to our people at Landers, but to also our wider networks, our families and to our clients about how you maintain, I guess, equilibrium in that very difficult environment.

**Michael Green** [00:27:43] Obviously, there is a community at work and within a firm people enjoy being a part of that community. We get energy from going to work and working with particular people. How did it impact upon people not being a part of that community, at least in a physical sense, only in a technological sense...?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:27:58] I think it certainly did impact people and I think we work very hard to maintain that connection. And I think one of the things, you know, in the covid crisis we needed to do well was to overcommunicate and to be transparent. And we did that in a number of ways, but also maintaining connection. So, in those early days in covid each week, I would have an "ask me anything" session where the staff would all come online and could ask anything they wanted anonymously. That's one example of how we could assist in ensuring people felt that they were connected.

**Michael Green** [00:28:30] Going forward, how do you see firms like Lander and Rogers operating in the future? Will it come back to the more traditional model where all or most of my time is spent in the office? Or will it be far more flexible? Where I spend, I make a choice as to whether I want to be in the office or I want to be out of the office, or probably some sort of combination, I guess.

**Genevieve Collins** [00:28:49] Look, I think that's right. And I think at the moment every organization is working through their own model. So, at Landers, we've done comprehensive surveys, but most recently done a flex survey. And we know that 95 per cent of our 560 people have said that they only want to work in the office part time. Seventy three per cent have said they want to work two to three days in the office. It's a very high proportion and I don't think we're ever going back. So, I think what's important to me is identifying within that what are the benefits of working in the office and what are the benefits of working remotely? And let's double down on those. So, the three highest rated features of why people said they liked working in the office was social collaboration, team connection and learning. So, we have to work out ways instead of trying to just go back, I think, to the old days and thinking that we're all going to be nine to five in the office five days a week, it's not going to happen. I think it's better to concentrate on how we can deliver proper learning in a hybrid environment, how we can maintain a team connection and social collaboration in that environment, and the things that people identified as working for them when working at home were not having the daily commute, having the flexibility to choose what you did during your own day. And the third one is an ability to do focus work without distractions. And I guess another interesting observation of something

that's occurred as a result of covid is a sense that people are reassessing their values, their priorities in life. They're reassessing their personal goals, but also their professional goals. And what that means, I think, for a law firm is that increasingly we are seeing that people want to work for law firms and organizations that share their values, something that's very important to our people at Landers is the environment. We did a survey around the environment to gauge interest about whether this was something that we should pursue more formally. And 70 per cent of the firm responded within the first 30 minutes, which essentially means that everybody who was not speaking to a client or in court put their pens down and to the survey. And as a result of that, we very quickly set our own environment targets. So, we're now 100 per cent renewable by 2022 to we will be carbon neutral. And our target is to be zero waste by 2025. So that's getting our own house in order. But what's really exciting is moving this into a more pro bono area. What can we do as thought leaders? As good community citizens to contribute to the climate change dilemma that the world is in, and that's what we're looking to do at the moment.

**Michael Green** [00:31:28] Have you got any evidence now to indicate the impact upon people, people's productivity in working more from home or exclusively from home?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:31:38] Yes, so we do, obviously, because law firms are very good at measuring financial data. That's one thing we're very good at. For example, in the financial year 2020, after the three and a half months working remotely, our fees were up, our expenses were down, people weren't traveling, there were no hospitality expenses, etc. And what that meant was that we have we had an above budgeted profit, which we then distributed back to the staff, which we were very proud to do. That trend has continued. So, I think we've very much moved on and debunked the myth that people working from home in inverted commas, are there doing nothing. It's simply not true. We are adults, we are professional, and people want to do a good job. And valuing what they do in valuing their performance in terms of what they produce is what's increasingly important, rather than just how many units of time they are spending.

**Michael Green** [00:32:35] During covid, and going forward, what was and what will be the method of communication with the client? Now, putting aside a phone, lawyers regularly have meetings with clients in their office, at the client's office, whatever. Is that changing as well?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:32:49] I think it is changing and I think we realize that realized change because everyone, of course, is in the same position. So, the teams meeting, the Zoom meetings are very common. It's convenient for people. They like it. They, too, are also navigating their own remote working arrangements. And we're finding that many clients, we still need some face to face interaction. There's no doubt that personal connection is vital and very important, but it doesn't need to be all the time as it did once. I also think there's a bit of a trend I've seen since covid about... I would call it a willingness to experiment. We're seeing that clients are more open to legal services being delivered differently and new business models. It's absolutely accelerated the trend in that. So, for example, with everything being digital, we see that clients are now liking hyperlinked advice, such as you would read The Age or the AFR online rather than a hard copy long advice. That hyperlink means that they can only go to the detail if they require it.

**Michael Green** [00:33:51] Genevieve working in this changing environment, do you find it exhilarating, exciting, stimulating, challenging all of the above, plus terrifying? I don't know.

**Genevieve Collins** [00:34:02] There's a lot of options there.

**Michael Green** [00:34:05] So how do you find working in this fast changing environment?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:34:09] I think it's fantastic. I think there are enormous opportunities, an example of that might be delivering legal services via a platform. So, a large car manufacturer approached us for advice about OH&S regulations in relation to their contractors. And once upon a time, what we would have done is provide a 60 page letter of advice, say this is what you're not doing. This is what you need to do. And here's the bill. That's not solving their problem. Their problem is they need to manage their contractors from an OH&S perspective. And those regulations, as we know, are continuing to change and be updated as we become as a community, more regulated not just in this area, but also in others. What we did was ask the client in that situation if instead of providing them with the hard hardcopy advice, we could build a platform for them which is embedded in that were the regulatory requirements that they needed to ensure were in place for their contractors. That's overlaid on a block chain. So therefore, it's immutable. And what that means is if the regulator then comes to them and requires that they demonstrate that compliance, they can do that in an immutable way. So, we sell that to the client on a subscription basis, keeping those regulations up to date.

**Michael Green** [00:35:19] Are there any security issues there? I mean, for unwanted third parties to be able to hack into that and find out stuff they shouldn't find out?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:35:27] There's always security issues. We're facing them and see them all the time. We spend a lot of money increasing amount and endeavor to keep our systems as safe as we can. But that's a stand-alone platform. So, the only information in that sort of a platform would be relating to that achiness environment that we've talked about with the contractors.

**Michael Green** [00:35:47] The Australian Financial Review have said that Lander and Rogers are a female friendly firm. What does that mean and why did the AFR say it?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:35:57] Yes, I'm really proud of that, Michael. I think, firstly, the AFR would have said it in response to their partnership survey because Landon Rogers, 43 per cent of our partnership are female, which is the highest of any Australian law firm of size. Seventy five per cent of our senior associates are female. We have a female CEP, me! We have a female chair of the board. We have a female head of technology and a female head of innovation. But I think actually there's more to it than that. I think to be a female friendly firm is good for business, and our vision is to provide the best Australian law firm experience and for our people to say that we are the best place they've ever worked. And in order for them to say that there needs to be gender neutrality. And I think there's a lot of scaffolding that is required, a lot of policy work, et cetera, to get there, apart from, of course, ultimately the culture. We have recently supported that with the controversies that are continuing to rage, I think, is fair around sexual harassment in the legal profession, everyone would have read about that. Landers response to that has been to develop a sexual harassment policy and now roll it out, which requires that every person within the firm who experiences witnesses or becomes aware of sexual harassment to report it. So, it is a mandatory reporting requirement. And this breaks the bystander silence policy or practice that we've seen in so many organizations globally and within Australia. And our people have responded really well to that. We've supplemented it with what we call a personal relationships policy. And that policy requires that if you are in a personal relationship with someone which gives rise to an actual perceived or potential conflict, you are required to report that relationship and it will be managed. So, I guess the cliched

situation is more senior partner being in a personal relationship with a younger member of staff. We don't approach it through the lens of morality. We don't care if those people are married or not married. This is not about morality. This is about the impact that relationship has on the business and therefore the need for the business to manage that relationship in a way that that senior person is no longer in a position to promote remunerate, etc. that younger person with whom they're in a relationship. And so, they're kind of some of the examples of policies that really support an environment, I think, where people feel safe.

**Michael Green** [00:38:30] You say reporting is mandatory. So, I work at Landers, I see something that I think is sexual harassment occur, but I don't report it. What are the consequences for me in not reporting it?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:38:42] Yes, it's a good question, Michael, and I think the consequences, as always, must be reasonable and proportionate to what's occurred. So, the expectation is that you will report it. If you don't report something, that is regarded as serious, there will be disciplinary action taken, however, proportionate to that issue.

**Michael Green** [00:39:00] Is the mandatory reporting anonymous?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:39:02] No, it isn't. And I think that's only possible in a culture where people feel psychologically safe to report and appreciate that that will be treated confidentially to the extent that an investigation is conducted, but also respectfully. However, I think this is really a complex area and the anonymity of complaints is a legitimate point, Michael. And in fact, one of our wonderful Lawtech Hub current residents is an organization called Ilker, who have built a platform which enables anonymous reporting. It's not just for sexual harassment. It could be for any within any regulatory environment such as whistleblowing, etc. But it enables in certain environments, perhaps less mature, less safe environments for that reporting to take place anonymously,

**Michael Green** [00:39:57] As you say, Genevieve, it is extremely complex. I wonder about anonymous reporting because does that trample on natural justice and my right to know who's made the complaint against me and therefore me to be able to respond appropriately, as you say, extremely complex, but extremely important as we've seen in all parts of our society at the moment, starting at the very top of our Australian society, all the way down. You mentioned an innovation agenda. What does that mean?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:40:27] Yes, my favorite topic, when I took over as CEP, I realized that the systems I think at our firm needed some attention. So, the only way I could make sense of that was to kind of chunk it down into three areas, stabilize, modernize and transform. So, stabilize. We cleaned up the backend. We removed all our legacy systems in terms of modernizing I guess we went to the cloud. We provided everyone with sufficient hardware for remote working, etc. The really interesting piece is the transforming, providing tools and platforms, automating basic tasks. So, what we did in that transformed area was we established a client innovation hub where, for example, when we were approached by a client to do a particular piece of work, we might see an immediate opportunity to present that in a different way. I've given you the example of the car manufacturer. So that platform was built in conjunction with the lawyers and the client innovation team who were able to put that into a tech enabled platform and give it to the client. But we've also established law tech hub and we are proud of this is a firm, Australia's first law tech hub in Melbourne and in Sydney, and have established them with YBF Ventures, currently on the corner of William and Burke in that beautiful blue stone building in Clarence Street in Sydney. We decided that what we wanted to do was

contribute to the legal tech ecosystem in essentially a pro bono way. We did not, as a firm, want to take equity in startups, and that was the model that YBF ran with. So, we partnered with them. We established law tech hubs. And what that means is we have startups and scale ups resident in the low tech hub, and we give them access to our clients and access to our lawyers to test users, test their products and to move them forward. And we do that as on a sponsorship model, people apply and if they're accepted, they can become resident of the Lawtech Hub.

**Michael Green** [00:42:31] Could you give me an example of the sort of people who apply the sort of products they're developing?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:42:35] Yes, absolutely. One of our wonderful residents is Stephen Foley, who you may know from TA Law. He established a brief ready platform, which he's one of our original residents of the law tech hub in Melbourne. And I think I think over 50 per cent of the Victorian bar would now use his platform, which is which is an electronic briefing platform where briefs can be up, digital briefs can be uploaded and then used in court on that platform. And covid really accelerated that. But that was as a result of Stephen had already built his product, but he then did user testing with many of our litigation lawyers, and he was able to add different features, et cetera, to that to come up with a product, but which is which is really industry leading.

**Michael Green** [00:43:16] And that product is a chain from solicitor to barrister to court. So, it involved all of those pieces of the puzzle.

**Genevieve Collins** [00:43:24] Yes. So just to give you an idea, we actually did some work on assessing what the improvement in efficiency that was achieved. First of all, it was a necessity because we needed to have digital briefs during covid. But even before that, the assembling of an average brief at Landers we timed to be two and a half hours by a personal assistant photocopying page. So not only was that bad for the environment, of course, but it was time consuming. So now with Steve's platform, it takes 15 minutes for a solicitor to drag and drop particular documents they want into the brief. And there it is, press a button uploaded and can be used in that way. So, it's extremely efficient.

**Michael Green** [00:44:00] And when it gets to the barrister and gets to the court, the courts are happy to work with electronic documents, not have paper documents in the courtroom?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:44:09] Increasingly so, and in fact, practice notes from the Supreme Court down require that lawyers have technology enabled platforms to be able to participate in a virtual courtroom. And it's no longer an excuse to say you don't have those that technology available.

**Michael Green** [00:44:23] Challenging I would have thought. For many barristers and many judges,

**Voiceover** [00:44:28] William and Lonsdale are brought to you by Greens List, one of the leading multidisciplinary barristers lists in Australia. Greens List believe in promoting conversation around the ideas and issues that shape not only our legal system but our wider community.

**Michael Green** [00:44:47] Just to wrap it up Genevieve, so we're looking at a 17 or 18 year old girl coming out of Killdara Convent, knowing what you know today, what would you tell that 17, 18 year old girl?

**Genevieve Collins** [00:44:59] Oh, yes. Looking back. Well, I think the first thing is I would say just be yourself. Don't pretend to be something that you're not. I would probably also tell myself to remain curious and I guess be brave and give it a go. And I quote Eleanor Roosevelt, wonderful expression, do something every day that scares you, because I think if you do that, then that behavior becomes a habit, that habit becomes a characteristic. And all of a sudden you are a brave person and you are doing things every day that scare you outside your comfort zone.

**Michael Green** [00:45:28] Genevieve, thank you very much for coming in this morning and for a most interesting and enlightening story about your life in the law.

**Genevieve Collins** [00:45:35] Thanks so much, Michael. It's been a pleasure.

**Voiceover** [00:45:42] Show notes from today's episode can be found at [Greenslist.com.au/podcast](https://greenslist.com.au/podcast). There you'll find links to things talked about in this episode, a transcript of the show and some wonderful photos of our guests. If you're enjoying Lives in the Law, please tell your networks and subscribe, write and review the show. It really helps others find out about us. Your host is former lawyer and Greens List clerk Michael Green. Our show is produced by me, Catherine Green, mixed and mastered by Windmill Audio and recorded by Alex Macfarlane, who also wrote and performed all the music for the series. With covid restrictions limiting numbers inside the County Court of Victoria. We are currently recording our shows at Owen Dixon Chambers on the corner of William and Lonsdale Streets in our beautiful city of Melbourne. We acknowledge The Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation as the traditional custodians of this land and pay our respect to their elders past and present. There is no doubt that conversations about justice have been taking place on this land for thousands of years, and we are privileged to continue the discussion here today.