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Building a life and a practice

A CAREER IN THE LAW DOES NOT HAVE TO FOLLOW A PRESCRIBED PATH

People are usually curious when they learn that I became a lawyer after working as a model and actress. It's not a common path, and it falls outside the usual trajectory of legal careers. Most people want to know how one led to the other.

By the time law entered the picture, I had already built a career and started a family. Choosing law was a pivot I made deliberately. I wanted a second career that would challenge me intellectually and allow me to build something of my own, while preserving the life I had already built.

That decision didn't come out of nowhere. The years I spent modeling and acting shaped how I approach work and responsibility. That industry demanded discipline, preparation, and constant self-evaluation. It required comfort with rejection, the ability to adapt quickly, and the willingness to begin again without waiting for external validation. It also sharpened how I read people, assess credibility, and stay composed under pressure. Those habits carried over naturally once I entered the law, particularly in a practice where judgment and human behavior matter as much as analysis.

Over time, people considering law have asked me versions of the same questions I once asked myself. Is it too late? Can I do this if my life is already full? Is there room in the profession for paths that don't follow a straight line? I wanted to write this because those questions deserve honest answers. Not a formula, and not a template, but a reminder that building a life and building a practice don't have to be competing goals.

Where life and practice meet

My days are structured around ordinary routines. Mornings usually begin with making a very specific smoothie for my son, hash browns exactly the way my daughter wants them, packing lunches if they want them, and coordinating school drop-offs with my husband. None of this

is remarkable on its own, but it sets the tone for everything that follows. By the time I leave the house, I have already made dozens of decisions, adjusted plans, and solved small problems.

After drop-off, I drive to my office in the Palms area of Los Angeles. The day might involve preparing for or defending a deposition, drafting a motion, advising a client, or attending a Zoom hearing. The work is demanding, but what often goes unspoken is the mental shifting required to move between roles. In the span of a single morning, I move from parent to business owner to advocate. That transition requires focus and efficiency. There is little room for distraction.

Having a full life outside the office has shaped how I practice law. When time is limited, you become clear about what matters. You prepare more deliberately. You listen more carefully. You make decisions without indulging unnecessary noise. Those habits influence how I approach cases and how I serve clients.

The challenge has never been choosing between my work and my family. That framing has never felt accurate. The harder reality is caring deeply about all of it at once. I am proud of running my own employment-law practice, and I am equally invested in the quieter, less visible responsibilities of raising children and maintaining a home. Managing schedules, navigating school issues, and staying emotionally present require judgment, patience, and perspective. Those same qualities show up in my advocacy.

That responsibility does not fade as children get older. My oldest daughter is now an adult and a professional photographer living in Brooklyn. When her number appears on my phone, I stop what I'm doing. Not because something is wrong, but because distance does not change the role I play in her life. Learning how to hold these responsibilities without ranking them has shaped how I

show up, both personally and professionally.

Law school with an established life

I attended Southwestern Law School through its PLEAS program, a part-time day program designed for students with significant family responsibilities. I chose it because structure mattered. I wanted to limit night classes and remain present for my children, even though I knew that doing so would not make law school easier. It simply made it possible.

Some classes started so early that I couldn't be there for morning school drop-offs, which was difficult. Southwestern was about an hour from my house in rush-hour traffic, and even as a part-time student, the schedule was demanding. Law school ran alongside a full home life, and the friction between the two was real. I carried guilt about missing certain school moments with my children, while also knowing it was important for me, as a woman, to pursue something intellectually rigorous and personally fulfilling.

Law school required both discipline and intellectual stamina. I had been out of formal academics for years, and my undergraduate degree was in theater. Learning to think the way the law requires took time. Some subjects came more naturally than others. I earned strong grades and discovered that legal writing was a strength, but there were moments that were humbling. Not because I lacked capacity, but because the demands were real and the margin for error was small.

Having a full life made law school harder. I did not have endless hours to study, and I could not approach it the way many of my younger classmates did. That forced me to be efficient, prepared, and honest about my limits. I learned how to prioritize, how to focus deeply in shorter windows of time, and how to recover quickly when something didn't go as planned. Those skills were not substitutes for intellect. They were necessary com-

panions to it.

If there is anything I would offer to someone considering law school later in life, it is this: The difficulty is not a reason to avoid it, but it is something to take seriously. Law school will test your thinking, your discipline, and your endurance. It will also expose your limits. That does not mean you don't belong there. It means you have to decide, clearly and honestly, whether the work is worth it to you.

For me, it was. Law school demanded more of me than I expected, but it also sharpened how I think, how I write, and how I approach complex problems. It fit into my life imperfectly, but it prepared me well for the kind of practice I wanted to build.

Early practice and finding my way to employment law

After law school, I clerked for a federal judge. As a judicial clerk, I researched legal issues, reviewed records, and drafted opinions for the judge's consideration. That work exposed me to a wide range of cases and sharpened how I think about legal reasoning.

Employment-law cases stood out. They were grounded in people's livelihoods, fairness at work, and dignity in professional spaces. They were complex and fact-driven, with credibility, psychology, power, and vulnerability often at the center. That combination of legal analysis and human behavior resonated with me. By the time my clerkship ended, I knew employment law was where I wanted to focus my practice.

After the clerkship, I worked at a couple of smaller firms and then in the employment department at a larger plaintiffs' firm. Each role clarified something important. I learned the mechanics of employment litigation and gained exposure to many cases, but I also became clear about how I wanted to practice. I cared about fewer cases handled with depth, careful strategy, and client-centered decision-making. I was less interested in volume for its own sake, and more interested in doing the work well.

That clarity ultimately pushed me to start my own firm after only a few years in practice. It wasn't a grand statement. It was a practical decision. If I was going to take responsibility for learning the law at a high level and for developing my skills as a litigator, I wanted the autonomy to decide which cases to take, how to work them, and what standards would guide my practice.

The lack of formal mentorship was daunting. I filled that gap by co-counseling with employment attorneys I respect and by becoming deeply involved in CAALA and the California Employment Law Association (CELA). Through that involvement, I found education, collaboration, and leadership opportunities that shaped my development as a lawyer.

Running my own practice has given me autonomy over my cases, my schedule, and the direction of my career. More importantly, it has allowed me to practice law in a way that aligns with the values that brought me to plaintiffs' work in the first place. That sense of autonomy and perspective would be tested in ways I could not have anticipated.

The Pacific Palisades Fire: Loss, displacement, and perspective

On January 7, 2025, my family and I lost our home of more than 15 years in the Pacific Palisades fire. One day we were living our normal lives in a house we knew intimately. The next day, it was gone.

For the first two weeks, we lived in a hotel. After that, we moved into a rental home that, while beautiful, was not ours. Our children's school remained intact, which helped, but everything else was unsettled. We were also navigating daily life with four cats and a chinchilla in someone else's carefully designed space, which added a level of stress I hadn't fully anticipated. I was constantly aware that we were guests in a home that wasn't set up for us or for animals, and I felt the pressure of trying to keep everything in perfect condition. What I missed most was the quiet autonomy of being in my own space: knowing where things belong,

how systems work, and moving through a home without having to think about it.

Losing our home also meant being separated from decades of things I had collected over the course of my life – beautiful handbags, shoes, clothing, art and personal mementos that mattered to me. Those things represented time, work, an appreciation for beauty, and heart-felt memories. Being without them was disorienting, but it also brought clarity. What carries me through has nothing to do with what I owned. It is the understanding that my sense of self, stability, and worth live in who I am, not in what can be lost.

This experience reinforced something I now recognize as central to plaintiffs' work. Control is often limited. What matters is judgment, adaptability, and the ability to move forward honestly without pretending something did not hurt.

Closing reflections

Looking back, my path into the law has unfolded in a way that made sense for my life. I did not follow a traditional timeline, and I did not begin with a fixed idea of what success was supposed to look like. What guided me instead was clarity about why I wanted to do this work and a willingness to make choices that aligned with that purpose.

What I've learned along the way is that a full life does not sit in opposition to serious legal practice. It shapes it. The experiences we bring with us, whether from other careers, family responsibilities, or life events that demand perspective, inform how we show up as advocates. They influence how we listen, how we assess risk, and how we understand what is at stake for the people we represent.

The law demands rigor, discipline, and judgment. It also demands honesty about limits and priorities. There are many ways to build a meaningful practice, and none of them require abandoning the rest of who you are. For those considering the law later in life, navigating unconventional paths, or questioning whether the expected route is the only viable one, I hope this offers reassurance rather than instruction.



A career in the law does not have to follow a prescribed path. It can be built with intention, over time, alongside a life that reflects who you are. ♦

Nicole Meyers is the founder and managing attorney of Principle Employment Law, APC, in Los Angeles, where she represents employees in discrimination, retaliation, and harassment matters. She completed the California Employment Lawyers Association's Leadership Conservatory (2023) and currently serves on the CELA Board of Governors. Nicole is a graduate of CAALA's Plaintiff Trial Academy (2023).