

Introduction: Welcome to the Enchanting Lawyer Podcast. The show that walks you step by step to improving strategies you can use today to grow your business. We show you how being kind, useful and, of course, enchanting will bring you more clients and build a thriving community. Now here's your host from sunny San Diego, Jacob Sapochnick.

Jacob: Hello everybody, welcome to the Enchanting Lawyer podcast. This is your host Jacob Sapochnick.

I'm actually recording this show from – I'm in San Francisco right now – and I have a very, very interesting, and I'm very excited about the guest today. Because I'm getting a lot of emails from young lawyers from all over the world actually, they are basically – they give me comments about the show and they like it but the biggest problem is the fear of how do we start? How do we excel in our practice? Can we actually make it as attorneys?

Today we start one of many interviews with brilliant young lawyers and my guest today is – her name is Nicole Abboud. She's an attorney in Los Angeles. She's practicing fashion law. She works with fashion designers and companies to set up their business entities and protect their brands.

Nicole graduated from Southwestern Law School in 2011 and she remains heavily involved in her law school's young alumni organization and many, many other organizations.

When she's not lawyering you can find Nicole chatting with many amazing millennial attorneys on her podcast, The Gen Why Lawyer Podcast, which is really, really good and I highly recommend you guys to listen to it. Nicole's guests range from attorneys who are finding great success in the legal careers to attorneys who have decided to pursue alternative no legal careers to find happiness if it's any possible.

Nicole, I'm excited to have you on the show. Welcome.

Nicole: Hi Jacob. Thanks for having me. I'm excited to be here.

Jacob: You mentioned before that you didn't feel so well so hopefully you will feel better after the show because that's what we do, make lawyers feel better; my new tagline.

Nicole: That's a good one. Yeah, thank you. Yeah. I apologize to the listeners because – hopefully my voice comes out clearly. It's a little bit nasally at this point but it should be good. I think we're still going to share some good content so that's all that matters.

Jacob: Absolutely.

I'm excited to have you here because you are a part of the millennial generation. Just people who don't know what it is, we also call them the Generation Y. Those people born, I guess, between 1980 and 2000 and they are the largest generation in United States and the fastest growing segment of workers today. And if we're talking about lawyers who are a part of this, they're going to have a lot of challenges and a lot of struggles.

I just wanted to ask you, Nicole. Why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself and how you get started in this area of law – you're doing fashion law. So, I'm just curious to hear about that.

Nicole: As you mentioned, I graduated from law school in 2011 – I actually started law school in 2008 – so both of those time periods are pretty significant. 2008 was pretty much the height of the recession and 2011 was not that great for law grads either. That kind of shaped where I was when I graduated.

Law school was great. I absolutely loved it. I loved everything about it. And I've always just been really academic and always loved being in school. So when I graduated and started working it was kind of a huge reality check. I'm sure that's something a lot of recent grads experience as well. Obviously the practice is never the same as what you learn in school.

I came out thinking I wanted to practice family law which is what – I took all the family law classes I could, I participated, I interned with a family law judge and I was all about it. And then I was lucky enough to find just a part-time job when I first graduated, but it was in family law. So I was grateful. I did not – for about six months – and then I realized I hate family law. It's not what I thought it was. I was not enjoying working with the clients. I felt like I wasn't really helping anyone.

So I spoke with my employer – it was just me and him. He was this little practitioner as well. I told him that I'm not really happy doing family law but I really enjoy working for you. So, is it possible for me to deal with the other types of matters that you bring in? Because he also dealt with the state planning and business and civil litigation. He didn't want to let me go either so he's like, "Okay, you handle everything else; I'll handle the family law."

So I actually stayed with him for about three years but I was part-time the whole time. He kept encouraging me to try to find another part-time job as well to just fill up my time because he knew he couldn't afford to hire me full-time.

During those three years I did some contract work here and there for other attorneys and then I realized that I really have this desire to help fashion designers specifically and it really stems a little bit for my background. I'm Lebanese and couture and fashion is just so big in Lebanon and it's spilling over

into the US as well. I'm not sure you're familiar with some of the Lebanese designers like Elie Saab and Zuhair Murad. Yeah.

So, it's kind of just been in my background, in my culture, and I figured why not use my legal knowledge to help fashion companies in LA because that's also a huge fashion industry on its own. So I started just kind of reading about it, doing as much as I can to learn about the industry and it kind of began to pick up some steam. Around 2013 or whatnot, I caught on to it finally.

So, I kind of just took all the CLE's, I got my hands on every book I could to learn about fashion law and I started meeting with fashion attorneys and just kind of picking their brains.

Three years later I spoke to my employer and I told him, "You know what, I really want to do fashion law and I think that I want to give this a go on my own." I was still part-time, as I mentioned, so I figured why not start taking on clients and see if I can do this thing on my own. I slowly started getting a client or two and I decided why not just branch off on my own and open my own practice. And so I did.

Jacob: Wow, that's very exciting!

I always like to talk to attorneys that are in niche areas because, you know, especially when you're starting out, the desire is to do pretty much everything because people – as long as they pay you, you want to take their case. But you've chosen to take a very, very narrow area. What does it kind of mean to be a fashion lawyer? What kind of things do you do? Do you represent the brands? Do you represent people that want to take stuff to market? Give us a couple of examples of what would be a typical client for you.

Nicole: Yeah, sure.

Yeah, it does sound like it's a niche area and I think for marketing purposes, gosh, it's so great to say that you're a fashion law attorney, but it really does encompass a lot of various practice areas. I feel like you're never really at a loss for work. But basically the two major areas that I handle are business formations and contracts and intellectual property.

In the intellectual property realm I do a lot of trademark registration and copyright infringement and enforcement. Let's say a client comes to meet and they have a great idea for a new t-shirt line for example – I get that a lot –and they have a great name. And they're like, "This is it. This is going to be our brand name and we want to trademark it." So I have to kind of talk to them and advice them on whether or not it's a good name, if we can even register it as a

trademark, whether they should do that. Register it now or wait a little bit. And then if we decide to proceed I file the paperwork.

I've also had cases where a designer copyrighted a print that they designed and then they ended up making some shirts out of it, or some pants, and they found another designer making the same pants with the same print and that was obviously theirs, obviously my client's. So, that's a copyright infringement matter.

In the business world it's the typically entity formation. If a client wants to set up an LLC, a corporation, I kind of advice them on what's the best course to take and file all the paperwork for them. And then, of course, it gets much bigger. There's immigration issues, there's importing/exporting, there's licensing. There's just so much that you can do.

Jacob: Yeah. It feels like kind of like in my area of law which is immigration law, but within immigration law we've got criminal, we've got business. It's kind of nice because you can brand it whatever way you want. In your case fashion law so it sounds cool and I know I want to be a fashion lawyer, everybody wants to be. But in reality it's contracts, it's IP, so it's really cool. And then, again, you can dress the part. Dress nice clothes and [unclear 00:09:27]. It's business expense. It's all business expense.

Nicole: Oh yeah. I never thought about that.

Jacob: You see. You see. You're getting some tips here too.

Nicole: Yeah, you definitely need to play the part. That's for sure.

Jacob: Nicole, I mentioned in the beginning that the millennial generation – in my firm I got a lot of young employees who come – I mean not that I'm old, I didn't say that. What I'm saying ...

Nicole: You're not old.

Jacob: There's a lot of people who are law clerks and the young attorneys who come to work. And I wanted to ask you as being part of this generation, what do you think is the main characteristics that defines you guys. Especially as you enter the labor force and especially in the legal field. Some things that are important to know both for the Gen Y generation to be successful but also for people that work with them, employers, that needs to know how to handle relationship or work.

Nicole: Let me just preface this by saying, I really don't claim to represent the entire generation but I definitely have some insights based on what I know and the people I've spoken to.

Jacob: Yeah, just your opinion, of course.

Nicole: Yeah.

So I think that there are a lot of stereotypes out there, which I try to dispel as quickly as possible. Some of them include as feeling privileged, maybe not wanting to work very hard. I personally think that the two big characteristics that sort of define our generation are wanting to be independent and wanting to creatively find solutions.

So, what I mean by that is this. I think – and as it applies to lawyers especially – I think that a lot of young attorneys who graduate are lucky enough to find positions with employers. They – and I don't want to generalize – but a lot of them do start to feel like maybe they're a little bit constrained by the employer's ideas of how a law firm should be run. So a lot of them start to feel this sensation like they want to just get out and they want to open their own firm and be independent. Obviously there's the whole entrepreneurial aspect to it. [Unclear 00:11:40] generation wanting to just make our own money and be our own boss. That relates to the independence.

As for wanting to be creative, that kind of ties in as well. We feel like we can do things a certain way that is different than how it's been done before. We think of creative solutions to legal problems. For an attorney, he's working for someone else who's maybe not accepting of that fact, it can cause some friction in the ... I guess in the workplace. I think that's why a lot of young attorneys want to break out on their own and ... yeah.

Jacob: But they don't realize, of course, all the challenges and the complexities of them doing this. But, of course, the desire to do to be independent because it's cool, right? It's cool to be your own boss; it's cool to call the shots, right?

Nicole: Yeah. It's cool to a certain extent but I think it's also ... It just satisfies a need inside a lot of us, I guess, to want to just do things on our own but also ... I think it really helps us develop into better human beings and to better attorneys if we're just out there learning as we go and just doing things a little bit differently, and being a part of a community that wants to do things differently as well.

Jacob: Absolutely. What I like about you and what you've done is ... and that you started and you're definitely taking a different path. I want to go and talk about your podcast because I think podcasting is such a beautiful, innovative way to reach people and enhance whatever you do.

So, let's talk about the Gen Why Lawyer, which is the name of your podcast. First of all, tell me a little bit. Why did you start a podcast and tell me a bit about your podcast.

Nicole: Sure. Well, I'd love to. I love talking about my podcast.

A little over a year ago I actually started blogging for my practice, for my fashion law practice. I had a blog, it was called Code and Couture, and I had been hearing how great blogging is for, I guess, marketing purposes for getting clients. I figured let's try this. I've always enjoyed writing.

So I started blogging. I quickly notice that it was taking a lot of time. Especially because I was spending all day at work already drafting motions and just writing the whole day. So the last thing I wanted to do when I got home was write some more.

As you know, legal blogging is a little bit different than just any other kind of blogging. You can't just write something and send it off into the world. You really have to fact check. You have to make sure all the laws' correct. You have to make sure that it's easy to understand but also entertaining, which sometimes can be hard for a legal topic.

I kept blogging for about a year and then I caught on to podcast. I discovered the little podcast app on my Apple phone and I went exploring. So I clicked into it and started downloading a lot of business podcast. I downloaded yours as well. Yours was actually the first legal one I listened to.

Jacob: Oh, thank you.

Nicole: Yeah. And I just fell in love with it. I just thought it was such a great additional platform for lawyers to explore, to send out their message into the world and reach the clients that they've been trying to reach through blogging. So I figured why not try it myself. It would be a nice break from writing all day.

So I picked up a microphone and just started – Before I picked up the microphone I thought about what I would want to talk about. And, of course, I thought about maybe I can talk about fashion law issues as well – what I was blogging about but in a podcast instead.

But then I thought I want to make it a little bit bigger. I wanted to kind of address some issues that I thought of ... Issues that were affecting me and that I thought were affecting others – other young lawyers out there. So I thought why not discuss the struggles that young attorneys are going through when they start practicing. Why not showcase the stories of young attorneys who are very successful and are very happy in what they're doing.

Also, I just wanted to, I guess, highlight the stories of young lawyers inspire others out there. Whether they want to continue in the law because I know a lot of young lawyers have moments where they think about maybe this isn't for me

and I want to just show them that. There are others who have done it, or maybe left altogether and they're successful as well. So, yes, I decide to launch the podcast.

Jacob: And so you've been doing this for some time now. What do you think are some of the lessons or some of the takeaways that you can summarize from these young lawyers that you can share with us some of the struggles and some of the successes?

Nicole: Yeah. So I had them in too, too long but I've spoken to a lot of great young lawyers, millennial attorneys, who are just kicking butt, and I'm inspired every time I talk to them. So, yeah, I do take away a few things every once in a while from every guest.

But basically I think the overarching theme is there's always going to be two groups of young attorneys. Some that absolutely love it, and they're going to do this for the rest of their lives, and they're okay with that. And then there are others who are unwilling to put up with the unhappiness and the unfulfillment of the legal profession and they are going to pivot and they're going to go find their happiness. They don't care that they spend so much money on their legal degree because they much rather happy and hopefully make a lot of money in another profession.

Jacob: Right.

Nicole: Yeah. So I guess those are the two big takeaways.

Jacob: People who are in law school right now and listening – and I know that we have a lot of people that are trying to figure out whether that's what they want to do. What are some of the things that you can share with people that are about to graduate that they can do before they graduate to become successful even they want to become lawyers? Are there some things you can do in law school before you even get out of there?

Nicole: Oh yeah. There are so many things you can do and I really wish someone would have shared this information with me when I was still in law school.

I think that, obviously volunteering, and just getting as much experience as possible; whether through your school through your externship office, or on your own in your community, is crucial. You need to not only get the experience but you need to get your face out there and you need to meet as many people and have as many people meet you and know who you are while you're still in law school.

I think, also, starting to create a digital presence, some kind of online footprint, is very important as well. That's something I wish I started earlier. A lot of people have obviously social platforms either Twitter or Facebook or Instagram and that's a place to start. I think that's a small start and that's great but start posting anything that you find or anything that you produce yourself and start sharing it with the world and start creating a name for yourself online.

Jacob: Right.

Nicole: Yeah. So I think those are just two big things that you can start while you're still in school and I realize it's a lot. I know you're worrying about the bar at that point but these are just small things that you can start doing and it really will set you up for success later on.

Jacob: Absolutely. And, you know, whenever I speak in law schools I always tell students that, you know, right now it's so easy. We've got Twitter, you've got LinkedIn, you've got Facebook; you can start connecting with people. And just for the sake of ... I'm not asking anything but maybe commenting on some blogs, maybe building relationship with people that are connected in the legal field. Just so easy because once you're out there and you finish with law school you can just always step in and say, "You know what, I'm starting my law practice. I'm working for a firm. Can I write for your blog?" So they already know you by now and so easy kind of the transition. People feel that they have to graduate and then start hustling. That's so not true because you can do stuff even before law school as you start, right?

Nicole: Right. Even though ... as you say it is easy. I think it's just really scary as a law student to even think about ... A lot of people think who are they to reach out to these big name attorneys, asking them to meet with them or talk to them or give them a few minutes of their time. So, yeah. It can be easy but I think that a lot of lawyers feel intimidated or ... I'm sorry, law students feel intimidated and feel like they have nothing to offer those people that they're reaching out to so they might as well not. That's not the case at all. A lot of these attorneys are happy to meet with you but also they feel like they are contributing back to the profession by meeting with you and talking to you.

As you said, don't reach out saying, "Oh, I need a job" or "Hook me up with something." No. Obviously you want to just say, "Can I pick your brain? I'm interested in this area." I'm sure those attorneys would be more than happy to speak with you.

Jacob: Right. That's why the podcast is so powerful because, I mean, look at you, you have a podcast right now. And if you want to reach out to the top attorney in fashion law all you have to do is just send them an email and say, "I have this

podcast and I would like to have you on the show because you're such a great fashion lawyer."

Nicole: Right.

Jacob: Who would say no, right? But if you didn't have the podcast, you're just Nicole from Los Angeles who just wants to talk to this guy, maybe not even an email response.

Nicole: Right. Yeah, no, it definitely helps to have some kind of ammo with you.

Jacob: Something.

Nicole: Right, something.

If you're a law student maybe you can write an article for your law school's newsletter and interview someone and you can reach out to someone you really want to talk to that way. Or start a blog. It's easy, it's free. Set something up and that gives you some kind of leverage to reach out to people and say, "Can I talk to you for my blog?"

Jacob: Exactly. For no other reason.

Nicole: Right. And then obviously it's on you to maintain that connection afterwards, which is a whole other subject. But, yeah, that's a good start at least.

Jacob: Yeah. I totally agree on that.

A lot of the questions that I get from people who are starting out – whether they're young lawyers or not, but especially from young lawyers – is that how do we consistently get business for a new practice or if we start as a new attorney for the practice that we work for. I wanted to ask you how do you, at this point, get your business. Maybe you can share with us some of the strategies. Maybe you use social media, maybe you do a lot of networking. But I'm curious to know, somebody who just started out, building their practice.

Nicole: Yeah. I realize the popular answer is to network, right? But I've been thinking about this a lot lately and I've come to the decision that I hate the word networking and I hate networking itself. So I think maybe we should all start replacing networking with just building communities because it just sounds friendlier. I feel like it's a little bit more beneficial and here's what I mean by it.

Obviously you still need to go out and meet people and, sure, it can be a networking mixers. But I think that every time you volunteer somewhere, or participate in something, or meet anyone anywhere, you need to think about whether or not these people ... their values align with yours. And if so, you need

to somehow bring them into your community. Make them a part of this group of individuals who are like-minded, who share somewhat of a similar purpose, and who want to move towards the same goal as you and help you get there. And you need to just kind of include them and engage them in your community. I feel like if they know what you're about and what you do, they will naturally start wanting to help you, and they will eventually refer people to you, or bring business to you somehow, or want to partner up with you on some kind of work. And I think that's how I've kind of gone all the clients that I've gone.

It wasn't so much because I went to networking mixers and met someone – I gave them my card – and all of a sudden they referred someone to me. Because there are so many other intellectual property attorneys or business attorneys.

I go to events with the intent of just making friends, getting to know people, and keeping in contact and seeing how I can help them. So every time I meet someone I see if there's something I can offer them of value. Usually they always keep me in mind when they come across someone who's starting some kind of fashion line or needs any kind of even non-fashion law related help; any kind of legal advice. And I'm usually the first one – I'm usually top of mind.

So, yeah. I would say focus on trying to create some kind of community, nurture and cultivate a community around you and that's going to be your people, your tribe, and that's who is going to end up giving you business.

Jacob: I agree with you 100%. I think that you can still do all the tools and social media and everything else and the regular advertising. But I think if you build relationship correctly and you become a connector. I always tell people, if you want to become the source, the center, and then you are the one who connects people for no reason, eventually they're going to start thinking about you and it's a sustainable way to build a practice. People always think about themselves first as oppose to thinking about others. Becoming a connector is really the most powerful way to build businesses today.

I started doing it almost every day. Just people who are – for no reason. You met the baker and he may need somebody who can fix their truck so I'll connect the two. It's always kind of coming back to whoever connected them. Always remember there was me. Because one day they may need an immigration lawyer or whatever lawyer ...

Nicole: That's who they're going to call.

Jacob: Exactly! So, building relationship is really the key.

Nicole: Right.

Jacob: Nicole, I wanted to ask you something that is not legal related but because of your fashion expertise and I think it will be a cool question to answer. I want to get some fashion advice from you.

Let's say we're attorneys and we want to go to the office on a Friday. Let's talk about men and women. What would be a good way to dress which is not too casual but it's not too formal on a Friday. Some suggestion for a guy. Maybe a mix of jeans or whatever, and then let's talk about women. But I'm curious to hear from you.

Nicole: Okay. Well, keep in mind that I've never worked in a firm where they were very strict about that stuff so we always have to dress ...

Jacob: Assuming there is no restrictions.

Nicole: Okay. Okay.

Jacob: People can be creative.

Nicole: Right.

At the end of the day we still are attorneys so we can't just go looking like schlubs. For men I would, I guess, recommend – as you mentioned – jeans. Nice belt and a button down shirt – if you feel comfortable with that. I feel like most men are usually comfortable in their clothes.

Jacob: Tucked in or not?

Nicole: Sorry?

Jacob: Shirt tucked in or not?

Nicole: Yes, tucked in.(Laughs)

Jacob: Okay.

Nicole: Sorry, I'm laughing because no one's ever asked me that. I think this is great. I wish more people would ask me for fashion advice.

Jacob: Well, I think it's important because if you think about it it's ... it's a rule of psychology where people form an opinion in the first five seconds when they see somebody visually; even before they open their mouth. I think it's so important to really dress correctly. I'm not saying in a particular way but the way we dress, it really says something about who we are in a way. So, that's why I think it's an important question.

Nicole: No, I agree, I agree.

For women I ... I'll just say that I've always been a fan of being a little bit fun with your clothes and not being so worried about tradition. I think if you're going to court that's obviously a different question, and you should always have a suit ready in your office, and don't be so loud. But I think if you're just in the office, and even if you're meeting clients, I think you need to show your personality in your clothing.

Keep it respectful but be fun with it. Use colors, use jewelry. I think obviously the rules have loosened up a little bit – I think. And I think at the end of the day it should be about what you're saying, what advice you're giving. Not what you're wearing, but you're right, people will see that first.

Jacob: Perfect.

Nicole: So for women – yeah, let's see. I guess on a casual Friday I would also wear maybe some nice jeans and maybe a blazer with a nice top underneath and accessorize it. Flats or heels, that's okay. Yeah. I think whatever you feel comfortable in. Just keep in mind that if you're meeting someone, be mindful of that. Yeah. But you're asking someone who – When I work, sometimes I go in in just jeans with my hair up in a bun and I don't even care when I know I'm not going to be anyone. I'm just going to be drafting a motion all day.

Jacob: Well, I just wanted to hear an opinion.

Nicole: Yeah.

Jacob: Sometimes people may wonder and you gave us some good tips. I definitely will throw in the Converse shoes in there sometimes just to make sure.

Nicole: Yeah. On my podcast, my icon – if your listeners happen to go and check it out – that's actually me standing in the middle with my Converse on. And I've noticed that I've been wearing them a lot more recently and they're just so comfortable. It's really hard to switch on to heels after you wear converse all day.

Jacob: And I have the same one on my podcast. If you look at the little art of the guy.

Nicole: Oh, yeah.

Jacob: He's actually wearing a suit and a Converse shoes.

Nicole: That's true. I never notice that.

Jacob: Exactly. Yeah.

Nicole: They're great. Sometimes I go to informal conferences that way but usually when I network I try to put some heels on and a skirt.

Jacob: Yeah. And you know what it does it kind of breaks down the formality and it kind of gives – makes us a little bit of a statement.

Nicole: Yeah.

Jacob: That we're not that serious after all but we know what we're doing.

Nicole: Yeah. Especially if you're meeting – right. And if you're meeting other attorneys, I mean, yeah, I got to impress a little bit but not as much as if you're meeting clients perhaps.

Jacob: Right. Exactly. That's perfect. So now at least we've got some fashion advice from Nicole which is going to be a first on our podcast.

Nicole: Right. [Unclear 00:29:34]. I'd be more than happy to individually talk to people about their wardrobe but that might have to be an extra charge, you know.

Jacob: Yeah. And maybe it's a new line of business for you. See, it started on our podcast. Remember that. Right?

Nicole: I'm so glad I met you, Jacob.

Jacob: And I got to collect the royalties on that.

Nicole, it was a true pleasure to talk to you today on the show. Why don't you share with our listeners where they can find you. You want to give us your website and your Twitter or whatever information you want to share.

Nicole: Yeah, sure.

Hopefully I'm easy to find. I'm all over social media. My website is www.genwhylawyer.com and it's spelled both ways: genylawyer.com or genwhylawyer.com. My email – which I highly encourage everyone to use and just reach out to me, I like to respond to all my emails. It's nicole@genwhylawyer.com. My Instagram is @nic_abboud. And, of course, my Twitter is @nicoleabboud, my full name.

Jacob: Perfect. We're going to make sure we have all these links in our show notes. So, if you want everyone to find you and get paid fashion advice, they can also find Nicole.

Thanks a lot, Nicole. I hope you feel better.

Nicole: Thank you! Thanks. I hope so too.

Jacob: Excellent!

For our listeners, if you have any questions, feel free to email me at jacob@enchantedlawyer.com. Love to get your emails, your comments, your suggestions, and we'll see you at our next episode. Have a beautiful day.

Closing: Thanks for listening. You can find even more resources, including the show notes for this episode, at enchantedlawyer.com. That's www.enchantedlawyer.com.