

James Williams Transcript

Bianca Connell-Flint Good afternoon. We are here with James Williams, the managing partner of the Seattle office for Perkins Coie. Welcome, Mr. Williams.

James Williams Thank you. It is a delight to be here with you.

Bianca Connell-Flint Thank you so much. So, I want to start off by asking you a couple questions about your background, how you started, where your roots are from, and how you essentially became the attorney that you are today.

James Williams Yes, I'm originally from South Carolina. I grew up on a farm in the middle of the state, a place called Rembrandt, South Carolina. It is very rural, probably a population of 400. It's about an hour and a half from the capital city of Columbia, South Carolina. My father was a farmer, my mother was a schoolteacher, and I grew up doing farm work. Driving tractors, driving combines, picking cotton—all the traditional things that you would expect. It goes along with being a farm laborer. And at some point, I decided that farming wasn't quite for me, and I wanted something that was a little more challenging, so I decided that I would go into the military. Recognizing historically, the military was a place for people to improve their station in life. So, I enrolled at a place called The Citadel. It's a military college in Charleston, South Carolina. After my first semester, I was fortunate enough to get an Air Force ROTC scholarship to attend college. The government paid for that, and then they gave me a deferral of my duty commitment to go to law school at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. When I finished Charlottesville, I started my career as a judge advocate in the United States Air Force. The government sent me to Union, Oklahoma; then to Ramstein Air Base, Germany; and then to a base in a place called San Vito dei Normanni, Italy. It's near a city called Brindisi, Italy. It's located at the heel of the boot. And from there, I made the decision that I'd served my country, and it was time to think about putting down roots somewhere to actually practice law. While I was going through that process of evaluating law firms in the southeastern US, primarily where I'm from, South Carolina, Georgia, North Carolina, I got a call out of the blue from one of my law school classmates, a woman named Marcella Fleming-Reed. And Marcella had used this thing called the Worldwide Locator System that the Department of Defense had set up then to find military people. So, she was able to track me down first in Germany. And then they told her that I'd moved to Italy, and they gave her the number for the base office. So, she called me one night about 7:30 p.m. while I was getting ready for a trial. And that's how the Seattle journey began. She convinced me that I should include Seattle on the list of places I was considering for practicing law. I didn't take it seriously at the time, but she insisted on me sending my resume and my transcript and my writing samples to her. And she managed to set up four interviews in Seattle for me with Perkins Coie, Davis Wright, Hessel Federman, and Lane Powell. And when she called me back in Italy to tell me she'd set up these interviews, I was stunned. Because I had already set up interviews for myself in South Carolina and Georgia with firms that I had either worked with before or I had anticipated that I had an interest in. So, I did all my serious interviewing on the East Coast first. And, in deference to Marcella, I added Seattle to the end of the interview schedule when I came out here, and I was blown away for a variety of reasons. I thought that the environment, obviously, was beautiful, but I thought the lawyers in all the firms were excellent—really smart people, really good people. And started thinking seriously about

coming to Seattle. But I wasn't quite convinced. I went back to Brindisi, Italy, and I was sitting there in my apartment. And again, at 7:30 at night, the phone rings. This time it's the hiring partner from Perkins Coie calling me in Brindisi to tell me he thought I could be successful here in Seattle and he was hopeful that I would accept the offer. So, by then I started to get the feeling that perhaps this is divine intervention. Because I go from zero knowledge of Seattle, well, limited, I knew what it was, to within 120 days—90 days actually—seriously considering Seattle as a place to move. After that call with the Perkins Coie hiring partner, I thought about it seriously and said you know there are very few opportunities; you'll have to try something different and new. So, give it a shot. I was not married. I didn't really have anything tying me necessarily to the southeast, so I came out here in 1993 and started my career at Perkins Coie as what they call a lateral associate—someone who already had some experience but was essentially new to the firm. I'd never done a summer associate stint here, never had any contact with anyone beyond the people I interviewed with, and started making connections and developing relationships from zero.

Bianca Connell-Flint Wow. To go back to your journey to Seattle, you'd never been to Seattle before. You picked up and moved. At that point in your career, when you were in Italy, were you thinking about coming back stateside, or where were you in your career at that time?

James Williams I was actually thinking about two things. One, the Air Force wanted me to move to Bowling Air Force Base in Washington DC to be what's called a regional trial lawyer, basically trying all the felony cases for the Air Force up and down the East Coast at the Air Force bases, which was attractive to me because I enjoy trial work. But I also thought about the fact that as a single person, they'd move me three times in four years. And I recognize that single officers are easy to be picked off and moved pretty much at any point that the government wants. So, I was more motivated about putting down roots in a place that I could start to practice and create a sense of community. So, with that decision made, then the question is where do you want to live? And in evaluating Seattle versus South Carolina, it was a fairly easy decision. I looked at a variety of things, to include the political structure. In the South at that time, it was white male-dominated, and I was very pleasantly surprised to see that in Seattle at the time, they had a Black mayor, a guy named Norm Rice, and the guy in charge of the county was Gary Locke, an Asian American. The math and recognition quickly dawned on me that only 6% of the population in Seattle was African American and probably 15% was Asian. It very quickly dawned on me that the white people in the region were very comfortable placing power in the hands of people who were diverse, which is completely opposite from what I had experienced in the South. It was a total surprise to me. And it made me feel that Seattle was a place where merit was more important than the color or the gender of the person. I thought it would be fertile ground to see if I could practice at the highest level, which I always wanted to do. That's how I made the decision to come to Seattle, in addition to the very warm overture from the hiring partner who became one of my mentors.

Bianca Connell-Flint Okay, the practice of law can be very isolating. So how did you find your community once you came to Seattle?

James Williams I immediately got involved with this thing called the Loren Miller Bar Association. And the Loren Miller Bar Association is the Washington affiliate of this thing

called the National Bar Association. And going back even further, the National Bar Association was created in the 1920s because the American Bar Association wouldn't allow Black people to be members. So Black lawyers wanted to have a place where they could talk about the latest developments in the law, do professional development, and network. So, the National Bar Association was created, and in various cities throughout the country, local affiliates started being created. The Loren Miller Bar Association was created here in Seattle in 1968 by people like Judge Charles Johnson, Gary Gayton, Lem Howell, and others who were really civil rights litigators and also personal injury lawyers who had a relationship with a guy named Loren Miller. Loren Miller was famous because he was one of the lawyers who litigated a Supreme Court case called *Shelley v. Kraemer*, which is the landmark case that struck down restrictive covenants in land transactions. Once upon a time, white people could put a restriction in their deeds saying you can't sell to Blacks or Jews or Latinos or anybody of color. And that case set the precedent that that was no longer constitutional. So, they were very impressed with Loren Miller. He'd come up here to visit them several times and they decided to name the organization after him. So, in 1968, they started it. It was the Loren Miller Bar Club at the time, and it continues to this day as the Loren Miller Bar Association. I had the honor of serving as the secretary of Loren Miller, then ultimately the president in 1998. And during that journey with Loren Miller, I met all of the African American lawyers who are now still very close friends and allies of mine; I would say Ron Ward was one of those people, Paul Boggs, Judge Richard Jones, Bonnie Glenn, Karen Murray. You name Lem Howell. You name even your father, Ray Connell. I met him through the Loren Miller Bar Association. So, it has been amazing what I consider the launch pad for a lot of my activities outside of the practice of law at Perkins Coie.

Bianca Connell-Flint And so you mentioned outside of the practice of law — what do you do outside of the practice of law? What does your life look like outside of Perkins Coie?

James Williams First and foremost, I love being a lawyer. It's my calling. It's the thing that I think animates my life, so I enjoy all parts of being a lawyer, including bar activities. I did a lot with Loren Miller, but I then started working a lot with the American Bar Association. I became what's called a delegate to the American Bar Association House of Delegates. The House of Delegates is responsible for setting policy for the profession. They're the ones who create the Model Rules of Professional Conduct, Model Rules for Judicial Conduct. They're the ones who do the accreditation of law schools throughout the country. The House of Delegates is essentially the legislature where lawyers from all over the country get together and debate policy resolutions that they think should be embraced by bar associations all across the country and by Congress, depending on the nature of the issue. So, I started doing that, and now I'm serving my last year as the Washington State Delegate, meaning I lead the delegation of all of the lawyers who are participating in the House on behalf of the state of Washington. And when I finish my term in August, I will start serving in the ABA Board of Governors. So that starts in August, and I get to play at a higher level on the issue of making policy for lawyers across the country. I'm excited about that. In addition to the legal stuff, non-legal stuff — well, you could call it quasi-legal — things like the Washington Leadership Institute certainly played a role in that. I'm a member of the board for the Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle. I'm a member of the board of this organization called Citizen University, which was created by a very dear friend of mine named Eric Liu. Its purpose is to evangelize democracy, which I think is a very important thing for all Americans. And other than that, I'm also involved in some local fraternities here in town.

Bianca Connell-Flint So you mentioned the Washington Leadership Institute and Ron Ward. How did you receive the call to serve WLI?

James Williams Pretty simple. Ron Ward had just been elected as the incoming president of the Washington State Bar Association in 2004. We were all very proud of him. And then Ron asked me to go to lunch. And of course, you don't turn down the president of the bar if he wants to go to lunch. So, we went to lunch, and I thought it was a lovely conversation. Ron was telling me about all of his plans, and I was saying, "Those are great ideas. I think you ought to pursue all of them." Then he mentioned, "I've got this idea about a leadership training program for young lawyers." I said, "That's a great idea. You ought to pursue that." And then Ron looked at me and said, "And I want you to lead it." I stopped laughing and I said, "Yeah, I understand." At the time, I was billing a lot of hours. I was a relatively junior partner at Perkins in 2004 with a lot of responsibilities, and I had never run a leadership program before. I didn't know the first thing about it. I told Ron very directly that I was flattered he would consider me, but there were so many other lawyers in town who probably had more seniority and gravitas and ability to do that than I would. I thought he should get one of those other people to do it. Then Ron took a few bites and said, "No. I want you to do this for me." And then I had a dilemma. The president of the bar says, "I'm not accepting the no. Will you do this for me?" And I then said, "I'll think about it."

The WLI was not a new concept. Ron had traveled the country in his preparation to become president of the state bar, and he'd seen versions of the WLI in Missouri, Maryland, and maybe one other state. He'd taken the materials from those programs when he visited. That's what he gave me. He said, "Take a look at these and see what you can come up with." And I looked at them, and thought that they were okay, but they were essentially one or two-session programs where the primary goal was just to meet people. There wasn't any real training element to it. It was essentially a small segment of what WLI does, which is introducing young lawyers to people who are of seniority and importance in the community.

I then sat down and said, "Okay, if you were going to map this out, how would you do it?" And I said, "Well, what are the things I wish I had known? And that someone had told me when I started the journey." That's how the curriculum was born. It turns out there are eight because I could only think of eight things that came to mind.

The first one was, "I wish I had known about leadership training." I wish somebody had sat down with me and said, "Okay, here's what a leader is supposed to look like, sound like, feel like." Why don't we have a session about that? Then I went about scoping out what that looks like.

Then I said, "Well, I wish I could have been told about what it takes to be successful as a lawyer." That's how the nuts and bolts of the practice of law came to be because I thought it was important for a leader to also be a good lawyer. I think you have greater authority when you speak as a leader if people think you're good at what you do.

Then I thought about, "What are the things that are out there that nobody's talking about that are also essential to being successful in getting good results?" I thought about the legislature.

Lawyers are always mired in the case law and judges, but the bigger picture is: How do you get those laws made? How can you influence policies that might allow your client to either avoid the issue altogether or be prepared to deal with the issue when it comes through in the form of a statute?

So, the whole point of the legislative process session was to teach what it was about, to introduce people to Olympia if they'd never been there before, and to essentially spark that idea about being more comprehensive in their ability to represent the client beyond just case law and the courts.

Then I also thought, "It would have been nice if someone had talked to me about other parts of the state." Because I don't think you can be a leader in Washington if you don't have any knowledge or exposure beyond Puget Sound. That's why we started going to Spokane. Spokane was the first choice because it's the largest city outside of Puget Sound, and it has its own culture and community and leaders. I thought it was important for young leaders to be exposed to people on the other side of the state and to get an understanding of how they feel about things.

Also important, I thought, was understanding the bar process. We don't have that session anymore, but the original outline I created had a session purely dedicated to understanding how the bar works, and that was the name of it. So, we had people from the American Bar Association, the State Bar Association, and various county bar associations giving a tutorial on how those organizations function and where young lawyers could find a way to plug in.

Another session was on meeting the judges. I thought it was important, especially for litigators, to have greater comfort around the decision makers they'd be appearing before. So, we had a session specifically targeting getting WLI members in front of members of the Supreme Court, federal judges, superior court judges, tribal judges, administrative law judges—the entire gamut of the judiciary—all for the purpose of making sure they knew and felt comfortable appearing before them.

Then there was the issue that always comes up for young lawyers: the question of if and when to pivot and change course in their careers. So, we had a session dedicated to the private versus public sector practice. We had people who were essentially veterans who had done both—either started in the public sector and gone private or vice versa or had multiple tours of duty on both sides—to educate WLI members on how they made that transition, why they did it, and what to consider if thinking about making the transition.

I can't remember all the other sessions that came to mind when mapping out the operating instructions for how we were going to make this work.

I met with Ron in August for lunch. I started putting together the operating instructions and the planning for the WLI in September. I gave Ron the proposed operating plan memo with the sessions mapped out, the organizational structure for member selection—the whole minimum three-year, maximum ten-year thing—the number of WLI members, and the list of people who were already on the board or who we thought we should target for the board.

Ron took that to the State Bar Association in October. We had a fairly consequential meeting where they had to decide whether to agree to my proposed budget of \$50,000. I mapped out the numbers based on the head count: how much it was going to cost for food and transportation for these 12 people and some advisors to meet and travel over the eight-month period. It came out to roughly \$50,000.

Lo and behold, the state bar was completely on board with the concept. They struggled with the \$50,000 because they didn't want to give up the money. This was a new concept. They didn't know if it was going to work. That's a lot of money to give to these kids who were barely in the bar. I understood that, but they voted and approved the program in mid-October.

We then advertised the program in late October. In November, we got about 60 applicants for the 12 spots. By November, right before Thanksgiving, we selected the 12. We kicked it off in January—January of 2005.

So that's the progression of how it started. The first year was really hard because it was new and we were starting from scratch, so we spent a lot of time on the first session.

I still remember who was involved in structuring it: me, Ron, Sharon Sakamoto, Anthony Gipe. I think we hired a consultant with expertise on leadership who gave us the concepts and leadership styles we should teach. Then Ron and I strategized on the best speakers to model those leadership examples for the fellows.

I think it was Mary Fairhurst and maybe Richard Jones the first year because he was on the board. Mary did collaborative leadership, Judge Jones did commander leadership, and Judge Richard Martinez was the first to do servant leadership. Judge Martinez was griping at the outset because he wanted to be the commander. I said, "Why not? Not everybody can be a commander, and you're great at leadership by example."

Once we lined that up, we started the first session, and it turned out far better than expected. Of course, we had no expectations of what was going to happen.

In that first leadership session, we also introduced a second-day training on race, gender, and LGBTQ issues and how to deal with those as a leader. I think they have separated that now to have a separate session on those topics, but originally that was part of the first leadership session.

We followed the outline: Olympia was second, then the legislative process, then the nuts and bolts of practice, and so on.

Bianca Connell-Flint So after the first session, why did you continue on with WLI, or why did you continue to have additional cohorts after that?

James Williams Two-part question. So, after the first session, which was exhausting, we were shocked at the feedback on the evaluations; they were off the charts in terms of the level of enthusiasm and engagement from the fellows. They absolutely loved the leadership examples. And what's not to love? You've got Mary Fairhurst, Richard Jones, Ricardo Martinez talking to

you about leadership and role modeling various versions. Then on the second day, there was an extraordinarily emotional and compelling conversation about race and gender and sexual orientation—conversations they had never had anywhere, with anyone.

We looked at the feedback and said, “I think we might be on to something, at least with session one, because we’ve touched a nerve and it’s resonating.” The other thing we didn’t know was that the gelling and cohesion process had really gotten underway with that first weekend, having them basically at a retreat and getting to know one another and bond. That bonding happened immediately after the first session.

So, we said, “Okay, this is good. Let’s see what happens.” We continued on with all the other sessions and kept getting sterling feedback from all the fellows—literally on all the presentations and presenters throughout that entire year. We thought that was pretty good. Then we got to the last session, and that’s when the light bulb went on in my head: we had to keep doing it. Here’s why: We didn’t have a graduation because we didn’t know what we were doing. We just said, “Okay, it’s over.” Then the fellows wanted to share what they had learned—the eight-month journey—and it was an incredibly powerful moment.

I remember eight of the twelve were crying about the experience, literally crying, because of how much they’d learned, how much they had bonded, and how they felt like they had a sense of community that they didn’t have before. It had changed their lives. That was the moment that got me. I was thinking, “Well, I know the program was good, but I didn’t know it was changing anybody’s life.”

When we heard that, Ron and I looked at each other and said, “Hmm. I guess we can’t just do one. We’re going to have to keep doing this and see whether we can change some other lives.” So, at the end of that first year, we felt very comfortable that the program had legs—that it had something of interest and value to young lawyers in the market. That’s how we kicked it off. Was there another question on that?

Bianca Connell-Flint I think you answered it.

James Williams Okay.

Bianca Connell-Flint And so, what was your last year as co-chair?

James Williams I think probably the best thing we did was to have Justice Mary Yu come in as co-chair because the first year was so hard. I was chairing and actually coordinating probably five of the eight sessions. I was physically exhausted, and I had a day job as well. As much as I enjoyed spending time with the young lawyers and watching them grow, I didn’t think it was sustainable.

Mary Yu was a breath of fresh air. She came in during the second year, and we co-chaired together. She quickly made an impact, especially with the “meeting the judges”, because she had a span of contacts unparalleled by anyone else in the WLI. That showed not only in the number of judges she brought in but also in the programming she implemented for that part of the WLI.

To this day, I think that is one of the best parts of the WLI. That's the kind of change I noticed over time.

Bianca Connell-Flint That's going to be my next question: How did you see it evolve?

James Williams Here's the funny part. The WLI fellows stayed the same age over the last 20 years, but I got older! It's the funniest thing—I said, "These seem like the same age people every year." It dawned on me, "Oh, of course, it's three to ten years." You get a new crop every three to ten years coming in.

But I think the changes were for the better. New and different board members brought fresh ideas. It was gratifying to see a sense of ownership develop among later board members—they started to see it as their program. That gave me confidence the program was about itself, not me, and that it had resonance within the community and market. So, I became not irrelevant but unnecessary for the program, which was exactly what I hoped.

The succession to Craig and Erica was great, and the timing was perfect. It gave me latitude to do other things—especially over the last three years, because part of my day job at Perkins Coie was moving us from 1201 to 1301, the level of commitment of time and energy ratcheted up the time and energy commitment significantly.

When I left WLI about three years ago, it was right when the move got really intense—with closing the lease, construction issues, socializing the idea of the move, and planning the logistics of moving 370 lawyers and 600 staff. It was so time-consuming, I couldn't have given WLI my best self. So, I'm very happy the transition happened. You're here, so obviously it's doing just fine.

Bianca Connell-Flint As WLI evolved, you also evolved during that period. What did that look like for you in watching the legal landscape change, as well as your own career growth?

James Williams The evolution wasn't just me but also my co-chair, Mary Yu. We both grew and ascended during that time. When she started, she was on the Superior Court bench, and I was a relatively junior partner at Perkins Coie. Over time, Mary was selected by the governor to go on the Washington Supreme Court. In 2017, I was asked to be managing partner of Perkins Coie's Seattle office.

So, we both incrementally advanced in our careers, getting older and hopefully wiser. More importantly for WLI, our networks expanded. That gave us greater ability to call on speakers and provide opportunities and access to fellows we wouldn't have had earlier. All of that was good.

Bianca Connell-Flint Now that we're at the 20-year mark and you've watched fellows grow from their 3–10 years practicing law into launching incredible careers, what has been your hope for WLI fellows as you watch them grow?

James Williams From the outset, my personal goal—and I think the organization shared it—was threefold:

First, accelerate the skill level of fellows to make them better lawyers.
Second, accelerate their maturation so they become more seasoned, experienced lawyers faster.
Third, accelerate their network so they have connections allowing them to be stronger leaders faster.

The goal was to train people and give them the tools to be super effective anywhere in the state and able to call on people statewide to help in leadership capacities. I think that goal is still being realized today.

We never fully appreciated the statewide impact. We thought cohorts would represent Puget Sound and many practice areas. But the reach is statewide. For example, my favorite example, Bonnie Hunt—she's over in Pend Oreille County. She's Black, the sitting prosecutor there, and a WLI grad. At the time, she was an assistant prosecutor who went through the program.

That shows how far the program reaches—places we never anticipated: Pend Oreille, Walla Walla, Vancouver, Bellingham, the middle of the state—you name it. We've had fellows almost everywhere. That allows WLI's influence to be truly statewide. And for it to be a statewide program.

Second, we didn't realize WLI would be the best investment of State Bar money the Bar would ever make. Here's why: It's one of the few tangible things the Bar can point to that it does with your money—\$50,000 per year, which stayed flat for 15 or 17 years. Because we got contributions from law firms and donors, the Bar got more presence and gravitas in places where it was seen only as a licensing source or organization that just takes money. They could see the materialization of their dues on the ground through WLI.

Third, we didn't expect what these people would do. Nobody went into this thinking, "We're going to have somebody who will be the Attorney General of Washington." That was never on the radar.

All we thought about was how to help young lawyers be the best, most effective leaders—and hopefully pass it on. One point is the ripple effect: WLI fellows share knowledge and leadership in their bar organizations and communities, so good leadership examples pop up all over the state. The windfall has been the amazing careers and people that have emerged.

Bianca Connell-Flint Now that we are at the 20-year mark, what is your vision for the next 20 years of WLI? Also, are you familiar with any other similar programs in other state bars?

James Williams Let me start with a reverse question. When we started having success with WLI, we got noticed by the ABA. They gave us an award after the third year. Other states became interested, and we freely sent them our operating instructions.

There were attempts at creating WLI replicas in Oregon, Arizona, Nevada, maybe Colorado. Several efforts were made, and I think they all failed.

I know the Oregon one failed because they violated a fundamental rule: no more than 12 fellows. They couldn't get their heads around limiting class size, so they went big—30 or 40 people—which is unwieldy and hard to build class cohesion.

We wanted it small and intimate so people could truly get to know one another. That's a fundamental part of the magic.

Some bars got enamored by the results they saw in Washington and thought, "Why not let everybody in?" That was a mistake.

Another difference is our advisory board was dedicated to making the program successful. We chose people vested in advancing fellows' careers. I don't know if other states' advisory boards were similarly committed. Often boards are honorific, chosen for names only. Our advisory board always had to do the work—taking on sessions, training, soliciting speakers, participating in execution.

I think other states never got that message. So WLI probably remains one of a kind.

Bianca Connell-Flint So you've been involved with WLI from 2005 to 2025. What is your vision or hope for WLI for the next 20 years and beyond?

James Williams Pretty simple. The people going through the program are supposed to be the next generation of leaders. My assumption is that, at some point, those who went through will recognize the program's value and want to be as dedicated to it as Ron and I were at the beginning.

Bianca Connell-Flint We've seen attacks on attorneys recently. WLI is focused on young attorneys. What do you think the challenges are for young attorneys coming up through the program—and future lawyers just starting their careers in this climate? How do you think they can overcome them?

James Williams That's a harder question. I assume you're referring to Perkins Coie being attacked by the President through an executive order.

I can laugh now, but those were dark days in March when we first got the Executive Order. We were the first law firm in U.S. history to receive an executive order from the President essentially designed to put us out of business.

We took it seriously. It was an existential threat. I think we did the right thing by fighting rather than capitulating and giving the President what he wanted, because so much more was at stake than law practice. It was about the Constitution, the First Amendment, the right to express yourself, the right to choose counsel, viewpoint expression without government persecution or prosecution.

Those principles drove us to fight. Fortunately with many law firms, retired judges, and the Washington Attorney General Nick Brown (who filed the first amicus brief in our case).

The lesson is you can't sacrifice the Constitution or the rule of law. If you're a lawyer who believes in those things, that's not negotiable.

The challenge young lawyers will face is the same we saw nationally: the temptation to use a law degree for making money or for doing what's right.

Some swear the oath but don't mean it—their real purpose is to maximize income.

Big law firms capitulating showed that.

The challenge remains: Do you believe in what you swore to? Those who do will be the true patriots and leaders protecting democracy.

Bianca Connell-Flint Thank you. And with that, what advice do you have for young lawyers—not just in WLI, but those who just passed the bar, who've been practicing, who might be thinking about pivoting their careers? Some inspiration?

James Williams First: Spend the time to master the craft. You have to be good at what you do before anything else because that's how you'll be judged—how you write, how you speak. That's the lawyer craft, whether transactional or litigation work.

People will decide if you're good by that. It takes time—Malcolm Gladwell's "10,000-hour rule" applies. That's about 7.5 to 8 years of practicing law, billing roughly 1,800–1,900 hours a year to master the craft.

It takes a long time. Don't get frustrated. Buckle up, do the work, and when you look up eight years later, you'll be someone people want to hire or seek opinions from.

Second: Find something about law you're passionate about, something that excites you—not necessarily the money.

My spouse laughs because I'm the only guy she knows who loves getting up to go to work every day. Everyone else finds reasons to stay home, and you want to go into workplace. I said, "Yeah, I do because I get great joy from my colleagues and the practice." That's the sweet spot—when you're passionate and enjoy it.

That makes practicing law enjoyable for me.

Lastly: Don't focus on law to get rich. Very few lawyers get mega rich.

If you want to be rich, don't be a lawyer. Go into business, start a startup, or join one and blow up like Amazon. Be profit oriented.

Lawyers sell time, and time is finite. We provide a service to people who need advice and make a good living. Don't get caught up in chasing mega-rich status as a lawyer because that's not the purpose.

Bianca Connell-Flint Thank you. That was James Williams, managing partner at Perkins Coie, Seattle. It was great to have this conversation and hear his life experiences and perspectives on being a lawyer. He's been a true leader in our legal community and a driving force behind the growth and success of the Washington Leadership Institute.

I'm Bianca Connell-Flint, and this has been *Voices That Move Us*, a project by the Washington Leadership Institute. Thank you for listening.