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Fierce advocate. Thoughtful mentor. Bilingual leader with Indigenous roots. Meet Bianca Kratt, K.C., BLG partner and the 2025-2026 national president of the Canadian Bar Association.

BLG's The Legal Listen is a podcast series exploring key issues in law and business. In this episode, Bianca joins our national managing partner, David Di Paolo, to share her journey building a bilingual practice, the importance of diverse leadership, resilience, and mentoring the next generation — and how the CBA amplifies the voice of lawyers across Canada.

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Dave Di Paolo: Hi everyone, I'm Dave Di Paolo, National Managing Partner at BLG and welcome to this episode of the Legal Listen. Today, I'm really pleased to be joined by Bianca Kratt, Partner at our Calgary office and the newly appointed President of the Canadian Bar Association. Bianca's actually the first BLG Partner to take on this role in nearly 50 years. In this conversation we're going to explore some big themes. What leadership in law looks like today, how resilience and inclusion are shaping the legal profession and what the future of law means for lawyers and clients. So, thanks for joining me today, Bianca.

Bianca Kratt: Thank you. Thank you for having me.

Dave Di Paolo: Your career has crossed provinces, languages, cultures. You grew up in St Raymond, Quebec and you're a proud member of the Wendat First Nation and you moved to Alberta with little English before becoming fully bilingual and a national leader in the profession. How have these influences shaped your practice in the way that you lead today?

Bianca Kratt: Well, David. Honestly those experiences have shaped everything about me. I grew up in a small town in Quebec as you mentioned. I went to Saskatchewan on an exchange program to improve my English. I moved to Manitoba to get a common law degree and then finally, I settled in Alberta to build my career. So, over the years I had to adapt and build bridged across different cultures by meeting different people all over the country. I became bilingual as you mentioned, which is now a big asset, a big strength of my practice here in Alberta where I can say that everyday, I practice in French and in English as well in my commercial real estate practice. Also, I spent over a decade with the Association of French Speaking Lawyers of Alberta, AJEFA, Association des juristes d'expression française de l'Alberta, including as President in the last five years. I acted as President of this Association. This is an association that focuses on access to legal services in French in Alberta, including access to justice in French in Alberta. This Association again, allowing me to meet with people, to build bridges again across different culture. As someone from the Wendat First Nation, connecting with other people with Indigenous heritage, or Indigenous background has been fantastic for me and has been a big source of inspiration. So, all of that, crossing cultures, practicing in two languages here in Alberta. Working in commercial real estate, that taught me resilience, empathy and really the value of inclusion because even working in a male dominated field of commercial real estate that re enforced how important it is to create space for diverse voices.

Dave Di Paolo: Now becoming the President of the Canadian Bar Association is both an incredible honour and a huge milestone. What does the role represent to you personally?

Bianca Kratt: Honestly, it's very humbling and very inspiring at the same time. I'm the 97th National President of the Canadian Bar Association, but only the 11th woman to serve in the role. So, for me it's about showing that leadership can look different. So, it doesn't have to come from someone who grew up in a legal family. I did not personally. I'm first-generation lawyer. It can come from someone who learned English as an adult, like I did or someone who carries Indigenous heritage. So, I hope that at the end of the day, my journey shows that CBA belongs to all of us and every lawyer has a place in shaping, in shaping the future of the profession.

Dave Di Paolo: Now you've chosen building a resilient legal profession as your theme for the year. What does resilience mean that in that context?

Bianca Kratt: So, when I chose resilience, I didn't really like pull this word out of a hat. I looked at what the past presidents had chosen as their topic or their theme for their year. So, two years ago, our president focused on the protection of the rule of law. Last year our president focused on misinformation and building trust in the justice system. So, after looking at their work, I came to a conclusion that it was time to focus on resilience and resilience what it means to me, it's about being ready, being ready for change and knowing how to adjust when new challenges come around, or come to us in a legal profession and in this world at this point. So, some of the challenges that the legal profession is facing where we need to show resilience might be for example, dealing with limited court resources, limited judges, limited court space, limited clerks, adapting to new technologies. We hear a lot about AI. Addressing the climbing public trust in our institutions. So, I see a resilient profession as a profession that holds onto its values, its core values, but also finds new ways forward. So, that means supporting courts, that means supporting lawyer well being, that means using technology, like AI, very responsibly. So, that also means making sure that our profession reflects Canada's diversity. So, if we do that, I think it will strengthen our justice system and keep Canadians' trust in our justice system and our institutions.

Dave Di Paolo: So, you talk about the rule of law and as you know the rule of law, it adheres to the rule of law, it's one of the core values at BLG. Can you just expand a little bit on the importance of the rule of law and how it matters to your presidency at the CBA?

Bianca Kratt: Absolutely, I'm happy to expand on that. So, the rule of law in my opinion is really what makes a fair and stable society possible. It ensures that everyone, individuals, organizations, governments, that everyone is held to the same standards. So, that consistency is what builds public trust and keeps our democracy strong. So, at the CBA we see everyday how important a strong justice system is and that's why we advocate for resources, that's we defend judicial independence, that's why we promote high professional standards. So, when those pieces are in place, people know that their disputes are going to be resolved fairly and in a timely manner, hopefully, if they have access to courts. It means that businesses can operate with confidence because they see that we have a stable and strong country and they see that it is a safe place for their investments. So, when I talk about resilience, part of it is reminding Canadians that justice is truly the backbone of our democracy.

Dave Di Paolo: So, Bianca as you know, something I speak about a lot is the lawyer and the law firm of the future, which to me means, delivering legal expertise at the speed of business. Now from your perspective, what should that look like?

Bianca Kratt: So, I think that to me the law firm of the future when we talk about that, the law firm of the future has three qualities, adaptability, inclusivity and purpose. So, when I talk about adaptability, it means that based on clients facing huge changes every single day, globalization, technology, AI, we just talked about that, climate challenges. We need to be ready to adapt and to adapt quickly. Inclusivity, so inclusivity because people want workplaces that support well being. The well being of their lawyers for example. They want workplaces that focus on flexibility and equity at the same time. In my opinion a diverse workplace doesn't just attract talent, it actually builds a stronger structure. Purpose, finally. So, purpose because younger lawyers in my opinion, they want to make sure that their work matters, that they're part of something bigger than just a piece of a paper on their desk, or one single agreement. They want to make sure they can contribute to the future, that they contribute something bigger. So, the law firm of the future isn't just about legal services, or providing excellent legal services, it's all about building an environment where people thrive, where the people can innovate and feel proud of the work they put out.

Dave Di Paolo: You just touched on AI. Now what role do you think technology will play in shaping tomorrow's lawyers and what are the skills or the mindsets that tomorrow's lawyers are going to need?

Bianca Kratt: So, in my opinion technology is already transforming our profession. AI can speed up research, it can help with drafting and even predicting outcomes. So, that makes us more efficient if we can use AI and it also in my opinion, helps our clients. Personally, I'm a very big fan and I'm looking forward to the future to see that AI is there to support lawyers but we need to know how to use it and that's the critical part in my opinion because technology has its limits. It cannot replace judgement, it cannot replace ethics or empathy. So, tomorrow's lawyer will need both. We'll need to be tech savvy, tech literacy, that's what they'll need, and they will also need very strong human insight. They need to be adaptable. We talked about adaptability. I think that's very important, they will need to be adaptable. They will need to be open to learning and grounded in fairness. At the CBA, we're developing an AI action plan to make sure we can support firms, especially smaller firms, sole practitioners, that maybe don't' really have the resources to deal with AI. We want to make sure that they're supported. So, we're working on an action plan there and again, the goal is to give lawyers the tools and the training while keeping ethics front and centre because at the end of the day, technology should enhance the human side of the law but it cannot replace it, that's very what's important.

Dave Di Paolo: So, you touched on the CBA, and I think this is a good segue into discussing your vision for the organization. How should national organizations like the CBA evolve to stay relevant and provide value to lawyers at every stage of their career?

Bianca Kratt:I think that to remain relevant, the CBA has to meet lawyers at every step of their career. So, for example, for young lawyers, it means mentorship. It means community, meeting your peers, meeting your colleagues. It also means early leadership opportunities. For me, the CBA gave me just that, gave me the friendships, gave me the connections when I first moved here in Alberta. For mid career, lawyers, it's about advanced skills. It's about professional development. It's about navigating career transitions. And then when you focus on senior lawyers, then at that point it's succession planning. It's helping them pass on the knowledge that they've gained over the years. So, all across those stages, the CBA has to be a credible national voice. And that's what I'm hoping to create this year. That means connecting lawyers across regions, across practice areas, and representing the profession, in Canada and, and abroad at the same time.

Dave Di Paolo: Now, one of the things you've been really open about is the barriers that women face in this profession. Is there one barrier in particular that you're passionate about removing?

Bianca Kratt: I would say for me, it's attrition. It's seeing women every single day leaving the profession for different reasons. But, this is something that I would like to address and change over the years. Of course, I'm not thinking that during my presidency year, I'll be able to find a solution to all of it. But if I can just help someone get back into the profession, then that'll be a success. What I see is too many women leave the profession mid career, and it happens sometimes because of a lack of flexibility. It can happen because of caregiving responsibilities. It can also happen because of systemic bias. Every time we lose a talented woman, it's the profession that's losing experience. It's the profession that's losing perspective. So, a resilient profession cannot afford that. We cannot afford to lose women like we currently do. So, what I would like to see is workplaces that are flexible, that are inclusive and that are respectful, not as perks, but really as essentials. And when women thrive at every stage, then the whole profession benefits from that. Clients, institutions, and society. And I'm hoping that I see more women in leadership, more women in partnerships at law firms because we have a voice and we should be at the table.

Dave Di Paolo: So I have one last question for you. Many of our young lawyers look up to you as a role model. What message do you share with them when they ask you for guidance?

Bianca Kratt: What I tell them is, always don't underestimate yourself. That's really the message. I had plenty of moments when I moved here in my early 20s, where I wonder if I belong, and what made a difference was finding mentors was finding sponsors who believed in me. That was really what made the difference for me. So saying yes to opportunities also, even when it feels intimidating, really, it was truly important to me. So my advice for them is say "yes". Say yes to opportunities and be ready. Even if you feel intimidated, or even if you feel like you're not ready, just say yes and jump into it and give 100% of yourself and you'll see how rewarding those experience can be. It's important to remember that resilience, it's not about never failing. It's about using all those setbacks, all those errors to grow stronger. So every lawyer has something you need to contribute to a profession, and the profession really needs your voice. That's what I would tell someone who looks up to me.

Dave Di Paolo: Well, Bianca, thanks for sharing your journey and your, your impressive vision. It's really clear to me that resilience, inclusion and principled leadership, they're not just words for you. They're your values. So congratulations again on becoming CBA president. It's well deserved, and I can speak on behalf of everyone at BLG and say we're incredibly proud of you. And to our listeners, I hope this conversation sparks you to think a little bit about your own role in shaping the lawyer in the law firm of the future. Thank you.

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