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[Q&A](#)

 **Women of Legal Tech: Early Client Responsibilities Can Be Pivotal in Accelerating Your Upward Career Trajectory, Says Sasha Rao**

  Sasha Rao, Partner and Intellectual Property Practice Leader at Maynard Nexsen, discusses how she gets to work with inventions that were once part of science fiction shows she loved, defusing tricky situations of sexism in the workplace, and how technology, including AI, can improve the delivery of legal services.

 July 19, 2023 at 09:36 AM

Women in Law

By Alma Asay | July 19, 2023 at 09:36 AM



There's a shortage of women in science, technology, engineering and math. But within the legal tech community, there are many women with thriving careers. Legaltech News presents our latest "STEM Cell" profile. Alma Asay recently interviewed Sasha Rao.

This profile is a continuation of the Women of Legal Tech series originally published by Editor Monica Bay "in order to inspire girls, women (and men)." From April through June, we featured women of legal tech who are partners at law firms.

What is your name (what you prefer to be called) and role?

My name is Sasha Rao—please call me Sasha. I am the practice group leader for the national intellectual property practice of Maynard Nexsen. I lead a full-service Intellectual Property practice that provides a full range of IP services from patent prosecution, copyright registration and trademark prosecution to IP transactions to IP litigation.

What first sparked your interest in technology?

A love for science fiction, perhaps starting in middle school. I was always fascinated by TV shows like Star Trek and reading science fiction novels by popular authors such as HG Wells. I found the novel technologies and worlds to be fascinating and I am now fortunate to be working in an area of law where I deal with the inventions that once were science fiction to me.

What was your "first seat at the table?"

As in life, there are many different tables in a career. Very early in my career, I was invited to sit at the counsel table in a patent infringement case. That was when I first felt that I had a seat at the table because I was representing a client in court and was advocating my client's position to the court.

In our experience, most people experienced at least a bit of serendipity to end up where they are. What serendipitous experience (no matter how far back in time) contributed to you ending up in your current role?

Early in my career, I was staffed on a very large high-stakes patent infringement lawsuit. Even though I was a junior associate at that time, I was lucky enough to get a lot of client and courtroom responsibility on the case. Looking back, that was a pivotal case that accelerated the upward trajectory of my career and led to many more professional opportunities.

What steps are you taking to champion diversity at your law firm?

Corporate legal departments increasingly demand that the legal teams they hire meet certain DEI criteria and commit to certain goals of advancing and promoting the participation of women, minorities and other underrepresented groups in the legal profession. We partner with a number of clients to support DEI initiatives by making sure that diverse attorneys are involved in giving legal advice on their matters.

Describe an experience where you or someone you observed served as a role model for how to counteract sexism in the workplace?

There have been times when I have watched and marveled at someone else's handling of a tricky situation involving sexism in the workplace. This is not just an issue among colleagues, but it could also occur with clients, customers and judges. When I was a junior associate a long time ago, I was once in a meeting with a senior partner when a member of firm management walked in and asked me to go make copies of some documents for him. It was apparent that he assumed I was an assistant and not an attorney. Much to my surprise, the senior partner immediately took the papers from the person from firm management, saying that he was going to go make the copies for him, thereby defusing the situation and also counteracting the inherent sexism of it.

How do you engage in the ecosystem of legal technology and alternative legal service providers?

My biggest challenge in my current role is inspiring my colleagues to think of new ways of delivering legal services that are faster and better. Clients are increasingly expecting lawyers to be responding to their requests 24x7, and lawyers are increasingly feeling the work creep into all aspects of their lives, even on nights and weekends. The challenge in any client services business is to provide excellent client service, which is not just excellent legal advice, but excellent legal advice faster and more efficiently.

Our firm has been exploring new technologies to support routine legal tasks such as legal research, document review and hosting, contract analysis and drafting legal briefs. We are also exploring new products offered by legal technology companies to support firm operations.

From your perspective, what are three ways law firms and clients can innovate how they work together to achieve better outcomes (for the matter or the relationship)?

First, law firms should have a good database of the legal problems they have solved for their clients or the work product they have created for their clients in the same way that technology companies have databases of customer data. It would be great to be able to analyze the historical work product created by a law firm in order to ensure that the best legal advice of their best lawyers (of today and yesterday) gets incorporated into the work product being delivered to clients.

Second, even though the legal industry has been late to embrace technology, by including artificial intelligence, law firms and clients can work together to enhance their collective efforts to improve the delivery of legal services and automate the routine operations of the law firm and legal departments.

Third, law firms should involve clients in selecting products used by the law firm in delivering legal services in the same way that technology companies seek customer input on the products offered by that technology company.

What is a work-related technology that you cannot live without?

I really love Casetext. I might be biased on this because I was a seed investor in the company, but I rely on Casetext as my AI legal assistant. I use it to do legal research, review legal writing for obvious errors in developing the arguments or simply to double-check case law cited in a brief or memorandum.

Please give a shout-out to a future Woman of Legal Tech—someone who, currently, has been in the industry for fewer than ten years?

Laura Safdie, who is the Chief Operating Officer and General Counsel of Casetext, is certainly a future Woman of Legal Tech. She has been a steady hand in helping Casetext break numerous tech boundaries and being at the forefront of the use of artificial intelligence in legal services.

Who is someone famous (dead or alive) that you wish you could meet? Why?

I wish I could meet Nikola Tesla, the inventor of alternating current. I would ask him how he feels about having a car company named after him where each and every car they produce runs on direct current.

What is the best piece of advice you've ever been given? How have you applied that advice to your own life?

The best piece of advice I have ever been given is to believe that there is no limit to my career potential. This advice has been difficult to follow at times because others certainly see limits to your potential from time to time, but as long as you hang on to all those around you who believe in your potential, things will generally work out.

If you had a week to do nothing but binge, what movie(s), tv show(s), podcast(s), book(s), or video game(s) would you watch/listen/read/play?

If I had a week to do nothing but binge on entertainment, I would watch documentary films about a wide variety of topics because they can be entertaining and informative.

If a book were written about your life, what would the title be—and why?

“A Series Of Fortunate Events”—that would be a good title for a book about my life. There have been so many instances of good luck in my life that I would not be where I am today without the support of countless people who I have been lucky enough to cross paths with—I am really fortunate and would like to thank each and every person who has helped me.

What is your go-to dessert, flavor(s) and all?

Lately, I have been avoiding desserts entirely. But my go-to dessert is chocolate cake, if I have one.

Next quarter, we're going to interview a few of the future Women of Legal Tech that our interviewees have called out over the past two years. What question would you like for us to ask them?

What is the one piece of advice you would have given yourself 10 years ago?

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