

Bottom Up Podcast: Discussing Intersections Between Law and Life

Do you want to listen as you learn about legal practice? Tune in to **Bottom Up**, a WisLawNOW podcast produced by the State Bar of Wisconsin, for engaging conversations led by Emil Ovbiagele and Kristen Hardy.

It's difficult to capture the conversations that are happening every day in the legal profession. Written articles are a great resource on the countless professional topics that regularly affect lawyers and judges. From the practice of law to the business of law, from legal developments, professional challenges, and opportunities to practice-specific content – State Bar of Wisconsin publications and resources such as *Wisconsin Lawyer*, *InsideTrack*, and PINNACLE Books and seminars, are (we hope) valued.

But law and the legal profession is a complex web, and written articles can't always capture the fireside chats, the personal and professional struggles, and the intersections between lawyers' professional and personal lives. Many times, those conversations happen organically among family members, friends, and colleagues, in the office, during meals, at local or State Bar events, or at continuing legal education programs or conferences.

Those valuable conversations inspired the State Bar of Wisconsin to create a forum – a podcast – for these types of conversations, one in which more voices could be heard, more topics discussed, and more lawyers connected through a conversational medium.

In 2022, **Bottom Up**, a WisLawNOW podcast produced by the State Bar of Wisconsin, in collaboration with co-hosts Emil Ovbiagele and Kristen Hardy, made its debut.

Although the monthly podcast targets newer lawyers – covering things like career advice, diversity and inclusion,

work-life balance, mentoring, law firm life, and nontraditional career paths – more experienced lawyers are invited to join these discussions and provide their own insights and perspective.

Starting from the Bottom Up

Newer lawyers (that is, lawyers in their first decade of practice) seemed a natural target audience for these conversations. In 2013, the State Bar released a report on the challenges facing new lawyers, noting things such as financial burdens, business training, mentorship, and work-life balance.¹

Many of those challenges still exist, and the podcast gives newer lawyers another forum to discuss them. In

BY JOE FORWARD

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Kristen Hardy (left) and Emil Ovbiagele, both 2014 graduates of Marquette University Law School, are co-hosts of the **Bottom Up** podcast. Hardy is the chair of the State Bar of Wisconsin's Board of Governors. Ovbiagele is the immediate past-president of the Young Lawyers Division. Photo: Shannon Green

Bottom Up Podcast: Published Episodes

The Bottom Up podcast is produced by the State Bar of Wisconsin. Find the Bottom Up podcast at www.wisbar.org/blog/pages/bottom-up-podcast.aspx, or wherever you get your podcasts.

Episode 8: Legislative Update and Criminal Justice Funding (April 2023)

District attorney and State Public Defender (SPD) offices recruit many new attorneys to serve Wisconsin's criminal justice system, which is historically underfunded. Now the system is at a breaking point, with prosecutor and SPD offices unable to recruit enough attorneys to fill vacancies. In this episode, the State Bar's Advocacy Team discusses criminal justice funding, other law practice-related legislation, and what lawyers can do ensure these important issues move forward.

Episode 7: The Road Less Traveled with In-House Counsel, Larry Whitley (March 2023)

Milwaukee attorney Larry Whitley went straight from law school to an in-house counsel position, immediately working on multimillion-dollar deals in real estate. In this episode, co-hosts Kristen Hardy and Emil Ovbiagele chat with Whitley about his journey. "There's no right path, just your path," Whitley says.

The Rufus King High School and Marquette University Law School graduate – a former Milwaukee Bucks ball boy and Marquette University Men's Basketball team manager – also discusses giving back to his community and the people who had the biggest influence on his path to the law.

Episode 6: Life, Death, Change & Purpose (February 2023)

In this episode, a near-death experience sparks discussion about self-reflection, making changes, lawyer well-being, and finding purpose. Co-hosts Emil Ovbiagele and Kristen Hardy speak with Joe Forward, communications director at the State Bar of Wisconsin. Forward discusses a recent near-death experience, which he wrote about in *Wisconsin*

Lawyer magazine, and the self-reflection that followed. Many lawyers reached out to Forward after his article appeared, an indication that many identified with the observation that everyone has flaws, but we can always change or recalibrate for the better.

Episode 5: Making Partner, and Refilling Your Cup (January 2023)

In 2022, attorney Rebeca López made partner. It took her almost 10 years, and a lot of work, to become a shareholder at Godfrey & Kahn S.C. In this episode, López – an employment lawyer who is also the vice president of the Wisconsin Hispanic Lawyers Association – shares insights on the secret to her success.

Episode 4: On Being an Entrepreneurial Attorney (December 2022)

Young lawyers and law students, this episode is for you! Co-hosts Emil Ovbiagele and Kristen Hardy join guest Alex Eichhorn, a partner at Tabak Law LLC, based in Milwaukee. All three graduated from Marquette University Law School in 2014 and each now has eight years of law practice experience. All three are also entrepreneurial lawyers. Ovbiagele started his own law practice, on his own terms. Hardy, a former college athlete, is an assistant general counsel at a Fortune 500 company. And Eichhorn has helped his law firm transform itself through new processes and technologies. Each tells stories of the challenges they faced, both in law school and in the first years of practice, and how developing an entrepreneurial mindset is so crucial for young attorneys.

Episode 3 (Part 2): Work-Life Balance and Young Lawyers (October 2022)

In this episode, the second of two on lawyer well-being and work-life balance, guests and co-hosts dig deeper into the topic of work-life balance and what it really means, what firms and companies are doing, and what they can do to create better workplaces for lawyers, especially young lawyers. Emil Ovbiagele (co-host), a small-firm owner in Milwaukee, and Kristen Hardy (co-host), an

in-house counsel at a large company, lead the discussion with mid-sized-firm partner Ryan Woody and Emily Stedman, senior associate at a large law firm. The panelists also explore the billable hour and how work-life balance and remote work affect things like diversity, production, and job satisfaction.

Episode 3 (Part 1): What Does Work-Life Balance for Young Lawyers Look Like? (September 2022)

What does work-life balance for young lawyers even mean? In this episode, the first of two on lawyer well-being and work-life balance, four attorneys with different perspectives discuss how work-life balance means different things to different people, depending on your situation. Emil Ovbiagele (co-host), a small-firm owner in Milwaukee, and Kristen Hardy (co-host), an in-house counsel at a large company, lead the discussion with mid-sized-firm partner Ryan Woody and Emily Stedman, senior associate at a large law firm.

Episode 2: Mentoring and Mentorship. Is There a Generational Divide? (August 2022)

What experienced attorneys view as positive mentorship may be different from that of newer and younger attorneys in their first decade of practice. How do we bridge the gap? Co-hosts Emil Ovbiagele and Kristen Hardy explore the topic with guest Syovata Edari, a former criminal trial lawyer who is now an award-winning chocolatier.

Episode 1: Intro to Bottom Up, a WisLawNOW Podcast (June 2022)

Meet Emil Ovbiagele, host of the new WisLawNOW Podcast, Bottom Up, produced by the State Bar of Wisconsin. Ovbiagele is the immediate past president of the State Bar of Wisconsin's Young Lawyers Division and founder of OVB Law & Consulting S.C. in Milwaukee. The monthly podcast will focus on issues of interest to young lawyers in Wisconsin and beyond. Tune in! **WL**

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More than 3,400 lawyers are members of the State Bar of Wisconsin's Young Lawyers Division (YLD) (automatic for lawyers who are either under 36 years old or in their first five years of practice following admission to the State Bar). Like all professionals, these lawyers start at the bottom rung and hope to climb during their careers. They often benefit from peers and mentors to help them along.

Bottom Up is a medium to discuss that journey. Lawyers new to Wisconsin

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law practice can talk about, and listen to, the challenges and opportunities discussed among their peers. More experienced lawyers can add their own wisdom to that discussion as all lawyers encounter both adversity and success along their career paths.

"The podcast was formed out of a need or an idea of exposing young lawyers and the issues they contend with to the larger bar," said Milwaukee lawyer Emil Ovbiagele, co-host of Bottom Up and immediate past president of the YLD. He was president when the podcast launched in June 2022.

"Younger lawyers, or those newer to the profession, make up a significant portion of the bar ... they have a stake, they have ideas, and they have a perspective. The podcast is intended to shine a spotlight on those issues they contend with and frame them from a young lawyer's perspective."

Ovbiagele, who started his own law firm in 2015, said the podcast would highlight younger lawyers but also feature more experienced lawyers to "have a dialogue" and discuss serious and important issues facing lawyers. He

teamed up with co-host Kristen Hardy, an in-house counsel in Milwaukee and the current chair of the State Bar's Board of Governors, to deliver a podcast once per month.

Podcast Popularity

Podcasts have become increasingly popular, especially among younger people. Finding podcasts in one's area of interest – from news, politics, and entertainment to sports, music, or health and wellness – is only a click away.

Like the Sony Walkman Cassette Player, circa 1979, podcasts are mobile – people can listen from anywhere: home, work, vehicles, while exercising, gardening, cooking, and so on.

A digital library of thousands of podcasts is accessible via smart phone apps, such as Spotify and Apple Podcasts. Busy lawyers can leverage their time by consuming information – when they want – while doing other things.

Podcasts are very popular: 62% of Americans over age 12 (177 million Americans) listened to a podcast in 2022, and 38% are monthly podcast listeners.² Of Americans between the ages of 35 and 54, 43% are monthly podcast listeners.

Compare those numbers with a decreasing radio listenership: 39% of Americans over age 12 had no radios in their household in 2022, compared to 4% in 2008. The experience of a Brewers play-by-play from Bob Uecker appears less important for younger generations.

The podcast format allows hosts and guests to explore ideas and topics through conversations that are published and consumed by those interested. Listeners get to know the podcasts' hosts – a primary draw when podcasts are hosted by people with big personalities – and dive deep into topical issues.

Podcast enthusiasts enjoy content outside the mainstream, curated to fit their personal and professional interests in specific topics.

Bottom Up Hits Eighth Episode

The eighth episode of the Bottom Up podcast was released in April 2023. Lawyers of any experience level could benefit from the stories and ideas discussed.

Many issues that lawyers encounter now are the same as or similar to issues more experienced lawyers have previously faced.

But many contemporary issues are much different than the issues new lawyers faced 10, 20, or 30 years ago. Consider that law school was almost six times as expensive in 2019 as it was in 1985, adjusting for inflation.³ And because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the last three classes of new lawyers entered the profession in bubbles, struggling to find mentorship and community.

Many of the challenges lawyers faced a decade ago, as outlined in the report the State Bar released in 2013,⁴ continue to exist. Perhaps having more open and ongoing discussions about those challenges will help Wisconsin's legal community blaze the best path forward. So tune in! **WL**

ENDNOTES

¹Challenges Facing New Lawyers Task Force Report and Recommendations (Nov. 2013), <https://www.wisbar.org/formembers/ResearchandReports/Documents/Challenges%20Facing%20New%20Lawyers%20Task%20Force%20Report.pdf>.

²The Infinite Dial 2022 (Edison Research 2022). The Infinite Dial surveys digital media consumer behavior in the U.S., with annual reports since 1998.

³Law School Transparency, *Law School Costs*, www.lawschooltransparency.com/trends/costs/tuition (last visited Apr. 19, 2023).

⁴See *supra* note 1. **WL**