The Trademark Lawyer

GLOBAL REACH, LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

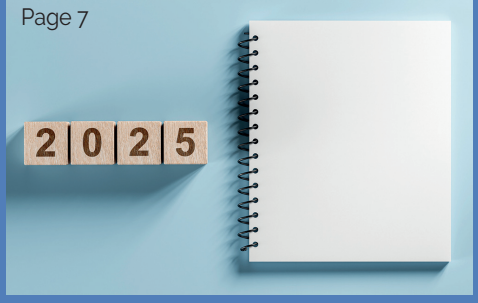
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Annual 2026

Protecting the persona: personality rights take center stage

As challenges like deepfakes and AI-generated likeness continue to grow globally, Ranjan Narula, Swati Dalal, and Vanshika Oberoi of RNA, Technology and IP Attorneys, discuss the evolution of personality rights in India as courts increasingly recognize the need for legal protections against the unauthorized commercial exploitation of individual identity.

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DotBrand: the compelling event of 2026
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CTC Legal Media

Women in IP Leadership

Celebrating achievements and continuing the empowerment of women



This segment is dedicated to women working in the IP industry, providing a platform to share real accounts from rising women around the globe. In these interviews we will be discussing experiences, celebrating milestones and achievements, and putting forward ideas for advancing equality and diversity.

By providing a platform to share personal experiences we aim to continue the empowerment of women in the world of IP.



If you would like the opportunity to share your experiences with *Women in IP Leadership*, would like to nominate an individual to be involved, or would like to learn more about sponsorship, please contact our Editor.

Celia Lerman: Founding Partner, Lerman & Szlak

An interview: inspirations, experiences, and ideas for equality.

Celia Lerman is a Founding Partner of Lerman & Szlak helping technology companies protect their intellectual property in the US and Argentina. She is also on the faculty of the Torcuato Di Tella Law School.



What inspired your career?

I started my law career with a technical background first. I attended a technical high school in Argentina and graduated with a degree in programming; one of only five girls in a class of 30 boys at the time. I loved math, physics, and computer science (I was a total nerd and still am!), and I even competed in the high school olympiads. At the same time, I was curious about the world and wanted a career that connected me to people and ideas, which led me to study law.

In my last year of law school, I took two elective courses in intellectual property and entered a paper competition organized by the American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) Argentina. I wrote about software protection under Argentine and US law, and I won the competition. The prize was a full scholarship for a master's in IP law.

That experience shaped my career and, looking back, my inspiration has always been a combination of my interest in law and my passion for science and technology.

How have you found the pathway to your current position? And can you offer advice from your experience?

The path to my current role as Partner at Lerman & Szlak has been a journey of connecting worlds. After studying my Master of Laws at Stanford University and passing the California Bar, I returned to Argentina with a clear mission: to build bridges between Latin America and the world. Since the beginning of my career at 21, I've been passionate about navigating different cultures: understanding their differences, as well as the opportunities

> **Parenthood sharpened my ability to prioritize and strengthened my empathy; qualities that serve me daily as a lawyer and team leader.**

that emerge when you bring them together. That dual perspective shaped how I wanted to practice law and the kind of firm I wanted to build.

When I came back, I quickly realized that I couldn't find a firm that truly aligned with my values. So, together with my business partner, we decided to create one. Lerman & Szlak was born with a vision: a female-led firm that embraces our clients' business-first mindset, is not afraid to stand behind their business goals, that operates paperless and remotely (long before the pandemic proved it possible), and even rethinks the way legal services are billed.

Building a firm that reflects these principles has been both challenging and rewarding, and it has also confirmed that innovation in law is not only possible but necessary.

If I could offer one piece of advice from my journey, it would be this: believe in yourself. There will always be challenges, moments of uncertainty, and people who question your path. But if you hold on to your vision and trust your own capacity to grow, you can build something meaningful, even if it doesn't look like the traditional model. Confidence in your own strengths is what allows you to innovate, take risks, and ultimately open doors that others might not even see.

What challenges have you faced? And how have you overcome them?

One of the main challenges we faced as a growing firm was the fast turnover of junior lawyers, a reality that many firms are experiencing today. For a boutique practice, this was especially difficult, as continuity and alignment with our values are key to delivering the service our clients expect. Instead of accepting it as inevitable, we made a bold move: we created a Talent Department, even though our firm was considered "too small" for such a structure. That decision transformed the way we attract, train, and retain our team, and showed us that investing in people is the surest way to ensure stability and excellence.

Another challenge I've often heard mentioned, especially for women in leadership, is the balance between career and motherhood. I am the proud mother of four, and while some might assume this makes professional growth harder, I see it very differently. It is not in spite of being a mom, but because I am a mom that I bring the creativity, focus, and efficiency our work requires. There is truth in the saying: "If you want something done, give it to a busy person." Parenthood sharpened my ability to prioritize and strengthened my empathy; qualities that serve me daily as a lawyer and team leader.

In both cases, the key to overcoming challenges has been refusing to see them as roadblocks. Instead, I've learned to see them as opportunities to innovate. Each challenge has been a chance to affirm our values, grow stronger, and build a firm that reflects the reality of the people who lead it and the clients we serve.

What would you consider to be your greatest achievement in your career so far?

My greatest achievement so far has been building Lerman & Szlak from the ground up into a top-ranked boutique firm that truly reflects our values and vision. When we founded the firm, the legal market in Argentina was not accustomed to the ideas we wanted to introduce: a business-first mindset, a paperless, remote practice, female leadership, and alternative billing models. Many thought these were unrealistic or too "different" for a traditional industry. Today, those same principles define who we are and set us apart in how we serve clients across borders.

Perhaps the most meaningful part of this journey has been seeing the impact on people: our clients, our team, and even my family. Building a firm is not just about cases or deals; it is about creating an environment where others can thrive, grow, and feel proud of the work they do. Knowing that we have built something lasting, innovative, and values-driven is what I consider my greatest professional accomplishment.

What are your future career aspirations? And how will you work to achieve them?

Looking ahead, one of my biggest aspirations is to embrace technology and automation to transform the way we practice law. The legal industry is changing rapidly, and I believe that an AI-first mindset is already here. I am returning to my roots as a programmer and my interests in law and technology to implement tech-driven solutions that make our work more efficient, more creative, and, frankly, more fun. My vision is to leave the repetitive, boring tasks to automation, so that our lawyers can focus on what they do best: strategy, problem-solving, and building trust with clients.

At the same time, I want to continue strengthening our position in the market. While Lerman & Szlak is already recognized and ranked, my goal is to be the first go-to firm in Argentina

across all our practice areas. This is not about prestige for its own sake, but about setting the highest standards for our clients and our team. For this, I will keep doing what has always guided our path: investing in technology, developing talent, and staying relentlessly focused on the needs of our clients.

What changes would you like to see in the IP industry regarding equality and diversity in the next five years?

Well, first of all, more female-led firms! (Just joking… or maybe not entirely!). In truth, I believe leadership diversity can genuinely reshape the profession, and it's exciting to see more women and underrepresented voices stepping into positions of influence.

Beyond that, I would like to see a broader openness that goes beyond stereotypes. Too often, the industry relies on traditional molds of what a lawyer "should" look like, sound like, or how they should build their career. Diversity isn't just about gender, but about welcoming different career paths, cultural backgrounds, work styles, and even new ideas about what law firms should be. By challenging these stereotypes, we open the door to greater creativity, empathy, and innovation in how we serve clients.

How do you think the empowerment of women can be continued and expanded in the IP sector?

I believe the empowerment of women in the IP sector can be continued and expanded through intentional networks, mentorship, and education. Building strong professional networks allows women to connect, collaborate, and gain visibility in spaces where they have historically been underrepresented. Sharing experiences, both successes and challenges, helps create a sense of community and shows that no one is navigating their career path alone.

Training and skill development are also essential. By providing targeted opportunities for women to develop expertise in IP law, leadership, and business strategy, we ensure that they have the tools and confidence to take on more complex roles and responsibilities. Education opens doors, but it's just the first step; it must be paired with active encouragement and support.

Ultimately, empowerment comes down to helping women believe in themselves. Encouragement, mentorship, and role models can make all the difference in giving women the confidence to lead, innovate, and make bold decisions. When women are supported to trust in their own capabilities, the whole IP sector benefits from greater creativity, collaboration, and ultimately, more impact.

"When women are supported to trust in their own capabilities, the whole IP sector benefits from greater creativity, collaboration, and ultimately, more impact."



Valérie Cambronne: Trademark Attorney, Founder and Executive Director, LegallyBlack

An interview: inspirations, experiences, and ideas for equality.

Valérie Cambronne is the Founder and Executive Director of LegallyBlack, where she oversees the organization's creative vision, impact, and operations. With over four years of experience as an intellectual property (IP) attorney and five years of experience as Founder and Executive Director of LegallyBlack, Inc., Valérie seamlessly combines her legal expertise with her passion for advancing justice and equity for underserved communities. As Executive Director, she is deeply committed to LegallyBlack's mission of empowering students through increasing their IP literacy. Valérie holds a Juris Doctor from American University Washington College of Law and an undergraduate degree in Political Science, with minors in Sociology and Legal Studies, from the University of Central Florida.



What inspired your career?

I have always identified as an artist. I started dancing ballet at three years old. Though I tried everything – jazz, tap, contemporary, lyrical, hip hop – ballet remained my foundation from elementary school through high school. I slowed down in college, but I never lost my appreciation for the art form or the creative minds I'd always been surrounded by.

In 2017, during my first year of law school at American University Washington College of Law, I walked into a trademark resources panel. One by one, Mattel's in house counsel, a partner from Venable, and a Trademark Examiner. Each revealed their creative backgrounds: a former theatre kid, a band member, and an artist. I remember thinking *"IP law is where the creative people go."*

From then on, I threw myself into every IP course my school offered: Introduction to Intellectual Property, Fashion Design Law, Music Licensing, Trademark Law, International Trademark Law. I eventually became a Dean's Fellow for the Program on Information Justice and Intellectual Property Law. I loved helping shape the department's marketing materials,brand presence, and supporting events like the annual Peter A. Jaszi Distinguished Lecture on Intellectual

Property. By graduation, I knew exactly where I wanted to spend my career: at the intersection of creativity and law; protecting the very thing I had spent my life practicing as a dancer.

How have you found the pathway to your current position? And can you offer advice from your experience?

Honestly, the path to leading LegallyBlack found me. I didn't plan for it.

In the summer of 2019, just before my 3L year, I was listening to *The Nod*, a podcast about Black culture. This particular episode profiled Crime Mob and their 2004 hit "Knuck If You Buck", a song that still goes off at college campuses and house parties nearly two decades later. I listened as Diamond, Princess, and Lil Jay recounted their story, explaining the dizzying success they experienced as teenagers, and the crushing reality that they hadn't earned a single cent from the song since.

I sat there stunned. Their story was too familiar: a narrative repeated across generations of Black entertainers who created cultural moments and were left with nothing. I felt compelled to do something given all the IP knowledge I had garnered as a law student.

When I first approached my co-founder, Kiara Ortiz, I had this half-formed idea about starting a podcast on IP law. But we realized something crucial: a podcast wouldn't reach kids like the young members of Crime Mob, kids with raw talent and big dreams but no blueprint for protecting what they create. We needed to be in the room.

On February 14, 2020, we hosted our first workshop at the BEYA STEM Conference in Washington, D.C. Over 100 high school students from the DMV filled the room. Using Hershey's Kisses as our example, we walked them through trademark registrations, design patents, and copyright law. I watched their faces light up as the abstract suddenly became tangible: *This is how you protect what you make. This is how you keep what's yours.* One student even asked if she could take a picture with us. I was touched.

That was the day LegallyBlack was born and the day we realized how we could make an impact using our degrees.

Five years later, we're a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that has reached over 1,000 students nationwide, with a team of eight volunteer attorneys across the country developing curriculum and leading workshops. We have hosted workshops at numerous institutions including Harvard, MIT, USC, Northwestern and have worked with many organizations including the American Bar Association, Usher's New Look, Just The Beginning: A Pipeline Organization, and the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship. None of this was in my law school plan. But it has been the most rewarding experience of my life.

> **"Their story was too familiar; a narrative repeated across generations of Black entertainers who created cultural moments and were left with nothing."**

My advice to young attorneys or pre-law students would be "leave room to change your mind." It's the best piece of advice I have ever received. I started law school very young, and time has helped me figure out my gifts and how best to use them. It does not look the way I envisioned, but I know I am doing what I'm supposed to do. The consistent progression and support has been evidence enough.

What challenges have you faced? And how have you overcome them?

My greatest challenge has been letting go of the story I told myself about who I was supposed to become.

I genuinely believed that practicing law would be enough. That it would fill every corner of my ambition and leave me satisfied. That a career in trademark prosecution/litigation was the highest and best use of everything I had to offer. Looking back, I should have known better. Even as a child, I was always raising my hand for leadership positions, organizing, and bringing people together around a vision.

Like many type-A perfectionists, I had written a script for my life with a very specific ending: successful attorney, respected in her field,and fulfilled. Done.

What I did not account for was the thrill I feel when strategizing a concept from inception to reality. The unexpected joy of scrolling through TikTok, hunting for trends to weave into curriculum for middle schoolers. The deep satisfaction of empowering my team members and building an internal culture where everyone has the tools to truly shine. These things light me up in ways that pouring over an office action never has.

I do enjoy practicing IP law. I love speaking with clients, demystifying the law, and serving as a strategic partner in building their brands. I am good at it. But what fulfills me most is not what I spent seven years training to do. The person I am might be bigger, and different, than the person I planned to be. That's the challenge I'm still learning to sit with.

What would you consider to be your greatest achievement in your career so far?

Founding and building LegallyBlack, without question.

We're filling a gap that should not exist but does, urgently. We are living in a moment where education is under siege, where the most vulnerable among us graduate with literacy levels at historic lows yet are simultaneously expected to thrive in a gig economy that demands entrepreneurship, self-promotion, and constant content creation. Their role models are no longer

doctors and lawyers but influencers building empires on platforms they do not understand, signing contracts they can't parse, creating intellectual property they don't know how to protect.

The kids we reach are inheriting a world that asks everything of them and teaches them nothing about how to keep what's theirs. That's the space LegallyBlack occupies.

What makes this my greatest achievement is that I've been able to take every difficult lesson learned in practice as an IP attorney, every connection made, every late night spent mastering trademark prosecution, and transform it into something that serves the communities who need it most. I didn't go to law school thinking I'd build this. But now that it exists, I can't imagine my legacy being anything else.

> **"My greatest challenge has been letting go of the story I told myself about who I was supposed to become."**

What are your future career aspirations? And how will you work to achieve them?

I have many plans for LegallyBlack and a future for-profit venture I would like to explore. However, for now, my goal is to sustain our momentum. In the near future, I hope to continue to grow our team, build volunteer cohorts throughout major U.S. cities, raise enough money to support our yearly goals, and become the premiere destination for Intellectual Property education.

What changes would you like to see in the IP industry regarding equality and diversity in the next five years?

Here's what I want people to understand about LegallyBlack's mission: yes, we may inspire a few future IP attorneys along the way, and that's wonderful. But that's not the mission of the organization.

I want diversity in the registrations themselves. I want to see a fundamental shift in who owns intellectual property in this country. I want underrepresented communities to stop being the talent and start being the rights holders. To stop creating culture that enriches everyone else and start building wealth that stays in our own hands.

The IP industry has benefited from many pipeline programs and diverse hiring initiatives to increase the amount of diverse attorneys. Many of which have been under attack this year and I do genuinely hope those efforts do not cease even if they are not made public. But diversifying the lawyers while the creators, the artists, the entrepreneurs, the innovators from marginalized communities continue to sign away their rights or never protect them in the first place isn't real change. We've just put different faces on the same extractive system.

My hope is that the thousand-plus students we have reached, and the thousands more to come, will create an entirely new ecosystem within IP. Specifically, where underrepresented groups understand how to leverage and sell their intellectual property to their own benefit, and where the next Crime Mob never signs a contract they do not fully understand.

