



2019 Ones to Watch: Genta Stafaj, DLA Piper LLP

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Real estate organizations: Young Real Estate Professionals of New York

How have your life experiences impacted who you are professionally?

I came to the U.S. as an immigrant from Albania. While my immigrant story has many details that are unique to my experience, it also percolates into the big pot that defines a “successful” immigrant story—hard work, persistence, a different perspective on things, the insider-outsider bind, the appreciation for and hustle in searching for opportunities, the desire to make my family proud and the curiosity to learn. These are all things that may have been heightened by my circumstances at a younger age but which have become so defining in my professional career as well. Whether it is working with clients (both domestic and international), interacting with partners or taking on new assignments and deals, I continue to be humbled and inspired by the opportunities but also excited by the challenges they present.

?What advice can you offer to someone who is just getting started in your industry?

Take ownership of your work. It is so important to put forward the best possible product you can while keeping in mind that you are not “playing at being a lawyer,” you are a lawyer. Regardless of the knowledge one has in real estate law, the work product you produce is a reflection of your willingness to learn and push the envelope. That involves asking questions, crafting the language, familiarizing oneself with precedent and more importantly, taking the time to think about what is being asked of you. It is hard to realize this at first because you are aware that someone else will be reviewing your work but that is not the correct mindset. From the moment you are given an assignment, you have to take ownership of it. The other part of this to keep in mind is that the “industry” is the real estate industry and you operate within that industry so you cannot lose track of the bigger picture and should always try to stay informed on what is happening in the industry because that impacts and informs what you do as a lawyer.

Who or what do you attribute to your success?

The belief that there is always a lesson to be learned and every experience should be seen as something you can grow from.

What was your favorite thing to do when you were a kid?

My favorite thing to do when I was a kid was listen to my grandmother tell stories. The only time I could get her to do so was when she would sit down in the afternoon with her handheld Turkish coffee grinder, her voice in harmony with the sound of the coffee grinding as she shared mystic stories with me. The enchantment with her story-telling must not have left me since I continue to find elements from her stories in the short stories I now write.

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