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 Do you think that the U.S. is ready for a:

Woman President

African American President

Hispanic-American President

All of the above



Looking For Latina Lawyers

## Pearls of Wisdom for New Latina Attorneys

**Believe in yourself.**  
 Cerda says that she was the first Latina partner in a large national law firm that had been around for about 100 years. "I couldn't let the fact that I saw no other Latina role models stop me," she says.

**Find a place to grow.**  
 "Young lawyers must find a place where they truly like the work they do and where they truly like the people with whom they will be working," Cerda says.

Be the best lawyer you can be. "Competence is requirement number one. Without it, there is no other avenue for success," Romero says. "Recognize that for the first couple of years, your career has to be your primary focus. Getting the skills you need requires engagement."

**Take charge of your career.**  
 "No one is going to give you anything you don't work for. And even if you work for it, no one will give you anything you don't ask for," Romero says. "If you don't get the opportunity you need at work, take pro bono work. Don't wait for that senior partner to come to you. Approach him or her."

**Meet your commitments.**  
 "Without that, you endanger and hinder trust. You are able to build trust by meeting your commitments," Romero says.

**Get mentors/sponsors/champions.**  
 Lawyers of color don't always have the ability to access sponsors — senior professionals willing to go to the partners' meeting and vouch for them and create pathways for them. Women may not want to go out to lunch with the partners or grab a drink after work because of the negative perception that they may get from others.

"Long-term relationships are important because law firms are fundamentally clubs and the partners vote to let you in or not," Romero says. "My mentors were middle-aged white males, but I was able to get their attention because of the quality of my work and my willingness to work very hard."

Lopez stressed the need to get mentors from the beginning. "Your sixth or seventh year is too late to be getting your first mentor. You can have a mentor who's totally different from you," she says. "I truly believe in informal mentorship and seeking out ones you want."

Learn how to build a book of business. "Latina lawyers must learn to affect the bottom line by mastering business development in competitive legal environments," Prego says. "Learn how to meet with clients and get them to know who you are so that they can call you with business."

Turn challenges into opportunities. Molina calls being a Latina attorney both a blessing and a curse. "You're heavily recruited because firms, companies and government want diversity. But once you're in, it's hard to find mentors and champions and gain access to high-profile matters to build the skill sets you need," she says. "If you are not in the network, and you get assignments that just aren't seen as important, you may not get the evaluations you'll need to get the promotions you want."

Cerda suggests that new Latina lawyers should not be afraid to accept the challenges that may lie ahead because of their gender and ethnicity, but also find a way to translate those attributes into assets that can be leveraged. "For example, Latinas are often stereotyped as being overly focused on family or, perhaps, too soft-spoken. But, we can bring our unique qualities to the organization as a 'value-add' and utilize our understanding of the importance of relationships and loyalty, or, our composure in handling heated debates," she says. "Accept your background and the differences you may have compared to others. I never hid who I was. I never threw it in other people's faces or had a chip on my shoulder, either. I just expressed who I truly was."

**Build your network.**  
 Atencio recommends that young attorneys take the initiative to join bar associations, not just ethnic-based ones, but the broader ones, too. "Become involved in specialty fields, on committees and on non-profit boards," she says.

**Lift as you climb.**  
 Prego believes that Hispanics can improve in supporting one another. "Everyone's competitive, but women have not fully reached high levels of leadership. On our way up, we shouldn't step on another. United, our voices will be heard."

By Ashley Cisneros

[This article has been edited for [www.latinastyle.com](http://www.latinastyle.com). For the full version, check out the January/February issue of LATINA Style.]

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