

Panel 3: Working and Organizing within Rural-Facing Public Interest Work

Moderators: Anna Goldberg & Christina Libre***

*Speakers: Tanmay Shula,*** John Meyer,**** Mary Cromer,***** Samantha*

*Ruscavage-Barz***** & Estella Cisneros******

INTRODUCTION

Anna Goldberg: Great. We'll do our last panel. If our five panelists would like to gather around the table there. Christina and I will take seats right there.

Hi, everyone. Thank you again so, so much for being here, sharing your insights, and telling us about all the important work that you're doing. I know that we really appreciate it. We're hoping that this could just be a time for us to get some of your insights as young future attorneys who are thinking about starting off our careers and if you have any insights to share on how we might get where we're hoping to go. We were hoping that first, maybe you could go down the line just to share briefly about your career pathway and how you ended up where you are today. Maybe we can start with Tanmay.

Tanmay Shula: Yes, sure. I was born in India and was born in Bhopal. Bhopal is where the Union Carbide gas disaster happened. It's not something that affected me personally, but it's always been in the background of our local politics and so many community efforts around there. It's something that I've always been interested in. I came to the U.S. for grad school in economics. I got a master's, and I was teaching. Then at some point, I realized that maybe law is my calling. Economics is a little bit too dry and theoretical, so I made that switch.

Then, during law school, because of my background, environmental law was interesting, but it also seemed like a good place where someone with a little bit of a background in economic issues could contribute because environmental

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15779/Z38W66997R>

* Anna Goldberg served as Symposium Director of Ecology Law Quarterly for 2022–23.

** Christina Libre served as Editor in Chief of Ecology Law Quarterly for 2022–23.

*** Tanmay Shula is an Associate Attorney at the Environmental Law and Policy Center.

**** John Meyer is the Founder and Executive Director of Cottonwood Environmental Law Center.

***** Mary Cromer is the Deputy Director of the Appalachian Citizens' Law Center.

***** Samantha Ruscavage-Barz is the Legal Director for WildEarth Guardians.

***** Estella Cisneros is the Legal Director of the Agricultural Worker Program for California Rural Legal Assistance.

law is just such a mix of economics and engineering, and science, and law. I applied to law school, went through it, and made sure that I took as many environmental courses, land use courses, and admin law courses as possible.

Then, after that, I decided to come and work at ELPC for two reasons. One is I really liked the folks there. The second is that through my experience in internships, I realized that I want to work at a subnational level because a lot of interesting things go on away from the headlines, essentially in the environmental world. I think that's enough for now.

John Meyer: I gave a good bit of background. I'm not sure how else I can—I'm passing that one for now.

Mary Cromer: Well, I grew up in Central Appalachia and had some experiences even as a fairly young child. In particular, all of the water for our community was sunk by an underground mine. For fifteen years, we had a plastic tank called water buffalo in our yard, filled up once a week, and that provided water for our house. All of our neighbors, that was the way they got their water.

The Surface Mining Act requires that if a coal company contaminates or pollutes any water supply, they must immediately replace the water supply, but that law has really never been enforced very well in Appalachia, and it certainly wasn't in our case. By the time I was eighteen, I realized that.

Then I went away to college. I went away, and I did some other things. During the time I was away, mountaintop removal really took off in our area. A lot of the mountains that I had grown up horseback riding on—there's a fairly large mountaintop removal site just to the south of where I grew up. It was land that I had known pretty well because I'd ridden horses there a lot as a kid. The experience of seeing that mountain blasted down and removed had a huge impact on me. By the time I had gotten my shit together enough to go to law school, which was by the time I was thirty, I decided that I wanted to focus on what I could possibly do to address some of the coal mining harms, so that's what I'm doing.

Samantha Ruscavage-Barz: The law was a second career for me. I spent seventeen years as an archeologist before. I got my doctorate in archeology and was working in the Southwest before I really got exposed to what was happening in the world in terms of—I got into it through a concern with air pollution because I have asthma, and so I'm directly affected by that. My grandfather died of black lung. He was a coal miner in the mines back in the 1920s when nothing was done or available for miners. He started when he was in the sixth grade working in a coal mine.

I had always had this in the back of my mind, but it wasn't really until I was working for the New Mexico State Highway Department, and they were expanding a highway in the southern part of New Mexico. The community there was really upset about it and formed their own group. I was in charge of the cultural resources that the highway was doing. Then we got sued, and I met a whole bunch of lawyers because prior to that, I thought lawyers did family law and family contracts.

I didn't really realize that there was an advocacy role that someone could do through being a lawyer. I left archeology school. I graduated in 2008, which was the time of the big economic crash. That included foundations that were funding non-profits like WildEarth Guardians and other small environmental organizations that, at other times, might have hired lawyers, people like me who really wanted to do that kind of work.

Through interning and externing during law school at different environmental organizations, I met up with an attorney—it was a two-person partnership—and they were representing WildEarth Guardians. I went to work for them after law school. They had about a year's worth of funding for me. In the middle of that time, the partnership broke up because one attorney went to work for the Obama Interior Department. Then, the other member of that two-person partnership was just working on his own in solo practice.

They sent me and the rest of my grant money over to WildEarth Guardians, and this was the first part of 2009. The attorney said to me, "Once you're over there and you're working for them"—they had two attorneys on staff at the time, she said, "I'm sure they'll keep you on. They'll see what a benefit it is to them to have three staff attorneys, and you can go and finish out your grant over there."

Well, like I said, it was the recession. Guardians, they were having to furlough people, so that meant every other Friday, people had to not work. They said, "This is just not the time for us to take a risk and add a third position for which we may not have the money." I continued to work for them without being paid. I was in solo practice in the sense that I brought cases on Guardian's behalf, and if we won or settled, I recovered money from that. I think I made a whopping \$15,000 in the year I worked for them for free.

I really wanted to do this kind of work, not want to work for a law firm. I did not want to represent the fossil fuel industry. I wasn't really keen on working for a government agency either because I find the agencies that are supposed to regulate often don't. I didn't really see the opportunity to advocate for environmental values and public health values, and that's why I was able to afford it. I have to say that because my husband had a good job. I was able to not have to search around and just take anything I could find so I could continue to work for Guardians. Because I had been an archeologist, I was able to teach in an adjunct capacity at UNM and at the community colleges.

I was hoping and hoping and hoping that once the economic downturn was over and WildEarth Guardians was able to get funding again, I would be well positioned, I'd be right in front of them. I always say it was like my year-long job interview with them. Lo and behold, they did get money so that I was able to be brought on permanently full-time in July of 2010.

They got that money. The Sierra Club was one of the funders because Guardians wanted to expand beyond just wildlife and forest service-type litigation. They really wanted to go hard into climate and energy work, which at that time was challenging BLM coal leases. Later, it also turned into challenging Office of Surface Mining (OSM) and coal mining plans. They wanted to do a

concentrated campaign against all of the new coal leasing that was being done. They got that money, and they brought me on board. I have been there and worked my way up from staff attorney to senior attorney to managing attorney to legal director. I am still there, and I'm still really loving what I do.

I will say one of the things that I love is working with law students. Coming to something like this, where I could both talk about my work and talk to law students, is like two of my favorite things to do. Also, Guardians posts on its website when we are looking for summer interns. We do have a stipend for summer interns. We also accept interns and externs during the year, but we don't have any stipend funding for that. I really personally love working with law students. The staff attorneys that I have now also love working with law students. Very interested in training the next generation of environmental and public land lawyers.

Estella Cisneros: Hi, everyone. I came to California Rural Legal Assistance [CRLA] straight out of law school. I grew up in a small farmer community of Planada. My parents still live there. After I went to college, I knew that I wanted to go back to the Central Valley. Couldn't decide between public policy or being a lawyer. I spent a year in the state capital. That wasn't for me, so I decided to go to law school.

Then, I came back on a Skadden Foundation Fellowship for CRLA out of the Fresno office. I was able to stay on as a staff attorney after that ended, and then I became a directing attorney for the Fresno office. Then I'm managing attorney, essentially, for two offices. Now, I manage a statewide program that represents our cultural workers. I've been with AWP's current and former programs since I started at CRLA. I haven't had another job as an attorney other than for CRLA.

The reason I chose CRLA was because I knew that if I wanted to work with farm workers and with the program that specializes in representing ag workers is very well established. They've been around for a long time. I consider it to be at least one of the premier farm-working programs in the nation. There's a few other legal aids that also have very excellent farm worker programs, but I wanted to be in California. They happen to have an office in Fresno and an office in Modesto. That's where my family is. I knew that I wanted to come back to work with farm workers. For me, the pathway to that was to work for CRLA, and I've been there ever since.

That was my pathway to doing what I do now. I really believe in the mission of my organization. I believe in the really important work that we do. I love working with farm workers. That's really what I have always wanted to be doing. CRLA is the organization for that in a large variety of ways. I just also do a lot of employment law. I happen to really enjoy employment law. I think it's really interesting. I didn't really do a lot of employment law in law school because I was at a law school that was not in California. It was all federal, and the protections for farm workers were non-existent for the most part at the federal

level. It was just for me, about coming back to the Central Valley and providing legal assistance to the community that I was a part of.

BUILDING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Anna: Thank you so much for each of those reflections. I'm actually— one of our questions, I think, is a direct bridge from your final reflections, which is, something that strikes me is that it seems like a lot of the motivation in each of your work is your direct ties to the communities in which you work being from there or having spent a really long time there. The question that is coming to me is, do you think it is necessary for young attorneys to go out into the world and feel really compelled by the issues you work on to be from the communities in which they're working in order to do effective work? If it isn't necessary to be from or have really deep ties and connections to that community, what counts towards doing positive, effective work with those folks? Maybe we can ask whoever feels called to respond.

Stella: I can respond. I don't think so. I think what matters more is spending time with people and really being in the community, having the community see that you are committed to advocating for them and spending time there.

I'm of the belief that it's really, really important that if you're going to do work in rural parts of California, you need to actually live there, be part of the community there to really understand what's happening, but really more so that you can gain in with the community if you don't have it through your background or you haven't grown up there, or whatever it might be. You also need a lot of time to develop trust with other organizations that have been there for a long time. You can't just show up and be like, "Hey, I'm an attorney. I'm here to fix everything." Nobody's going to take you seriously. You're not going to be able to make any effective change, in my opinion.

I don't think it matters if you share the same background. I think it's helpful, but I don't think that's the most important thing. The most important thing is being there, showing up for people, and engaging with people. People can see, "Okay, this person is serious about this, and they're not just going to be here for a week, and suddenly they come up with all the solutions." That's the other thing, too, is a lot of communities have a lot of solutions already. They may just need a little bit of help in shaping what they are and identifying, How do we make that happen? As long as you bring, in my opinion, humility and the interest in listening, and really just helping communities achieve success for themselves with a little bit of help from attorneys, I think that's going to go much, much farther than, "Hey, I grew up here." "Well, cool. That's great." It's very positive when you can make it happen, but you can also make things happen by spending that time and investing in communities in that way.

Mary: I'll just add. I agree with everything you just said. So much of it is about listening and spending time, taking the time, and really listening. I also just wanted to say, from the perspective of someone who is in a community where

I've been most of my life, there are times when I think there needs to be an outside perspective here. Someone else needs to come in and look at this situation, and maybe they can see things that I'm not seeing because I'm just in my track of "This is the way it's always been." I think as long as whoever comes in is very intentional, listening, and taking the time, I think that it can be really important to get that outside view.

John: We hired an attorney from South Dakota, and everyone loved him because he's a hell of a fly fisherman. He might not be from there, but he is willing to learn about the fish, willing to learn about the area and bump shoulders with the locals. That does go a long way. He might not be from there, but to the extent that he can be living in the place where you want to practice, I do think that provides some benefit. I know we're in the era of remote working and all that good stuff, but if you go to the place where you're trying to protect, you have that place in your blood, you go into the court, you can talk to the judge, you can describe the place to the judge you're trying to protect, they appreciate that because they know that you are committed to that area as well. Yes.

Samantha: Yes, and I would just add to that because I'm not from New Mexico. I grew up in Pennsylvania, but I think of New Mexico as home. If you had seen my hometown of Minersville, Pennsylvania, you would not have wanted that to be your home. It is like, I've been in New Mexico since '93, like that, I've been there for a long time. I feel my attachment to that place. The thing about New Mexico is New Mexico is a state and I've been in like in state court. It can be a really big deal if you live in a state other than New Mexico.

I was in front of the Environmental Improvement Board once, and because I was with an attorney, I was co-counsel with her; she was from another state. I could tell that they, because she said, oh, I'm from Washington or something. I could tell that they started to bristle. They asked me when I was speaking where I was from and if I lived within sight of our state Capitol. I said I could see this building from my upstairs bedroom. Then they sat back a little bit because they realized that there was somebody there advocating who lived there and was familiar with what was going on. That was in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

I do think that it is like John said, it's like you can have a strong connection to an area and you could be really invested in those values in that community. That's what really, when that comes across, is really going to have impact.

Tanmay: Everyone's already said almost everything that's important to say about this, but I'll add a little bit since I am very clearly not from anywhere that I work. Building credibility is extremely important. I wanted to show you, and it's not just important for the community; it's also important for you as a lawyer to do a good job. Here's an example. I live in Chicago, and this is not part of my work relating to rural areas, but it has to do with our work on the Chicago South Side.

Essentially, there's this Army Corps dredging facility that the Army Corps is set to expand in the South Side. It's something that I have been working on since I joined the ELPC. We were there when they were trying to get clean water

permits from the Illinois EPA. When they did the environmental impact statement and everything, and every step of the way, we have been there. It was only when I was assigned the task of talking to people to get their standing declarations that I really understood the full picture of what was going on.

It's not the same thing to go and talk to the South Side environmental community agency. It's not the same thing. You go and talk to the members of these organizations, and they give you very different perspectives. The reason is that, surprise, surprise, they're fully formed real people. They are not just environmentalists. Some of them actually, the one guy I talked to, he told me, he's about seventy years old and he lives there. He was like, "I used to get really annoyed at the fact that there were all these people constantly angry. Then, one day, I was in my senior housing, and I actually saw soot on my window. That's when I realized that, okay, these people have a point." Then he joined the organization, and now he's a standing declarant. People have very different journeys, and it's important to understand this. Sorry if I'm going on a bit, but there are two things that I learned. I just want to make this concrete.

The first is we are trying to protect a park, right? It's a park in the city. Everybody understands its value. When I spoke to fifteen people to get their standing declarations, I learned so many things. That park has a museum in which people from the South Side for fifty years have been coming in and giving their possessions. The museum is just a collection of the lives of people.

When you go there, which I had the good fortune to, you realize, well, I realized since I'm not from there, the rich history that has existed then. As Americans, I'm sure you know about some of it. The Pullman National Monument is there, and so much of industrial America was born there. There's that. Then, I also talked to an older Polish lady who was born in the house where she currently lives. I was just asking her, okay, to try to get the injury, which, in fact, was required. I was like, "Okay, what do you do? You swim at the beach. Do you go running? Do you come with her?" She was like, she was talking.

Then, around fifteen minutes in, I was sitting in her living room. She pointed at a photo, and she said, "Look, that's me cross-country skiing in the park." I was like, "That's amazing. That's something that I would have never thought the park is used for until somebody told me." Things like that really made me realize how much you— somebody just mentioned that unless you know the place, you will not be able to talk to the judge with any authority. That's true.

The second thing, apart from knowing what the park was about, was that there was a NEPA element to the case. Obviously, in any NEPA element, we start talking about alternatives, right? We say this alternative wasn't considered. One alternative to having a dumping facility might be to truck everything out. It's something that our legal theory was banking on. When I spoke to a lot of the folks that lived there, they said, "No, actually, I would prefer a dumping facility to stuff being trucked out because that means that the stuff on my streets passes every day."

Then you realize that, okay, you shouldn't just try to grab at every single argument that would sound good to a judge. You really need to, even when you're talking about very granular details, like they considered four alternatives, here are the other four. It's a completely theoretical exercise, but it's not. You'll only realize this when you talk.

THE BENEFITS OF BEING YOUNG ATTORNEYS

Christina Libre: Awesome, thank you so much for sharing your answers to this question. One thing that I've noticed that all five of you have in common is that you have a great wealth of experience in the communities you've been working in and just in the legal field. I think that is really juxtaposed with a lot of law students who are in the room who feel like we are just little babies in the legal world. We are nervous about making our next move. My question for all of you is, "What could be the benefits of being young and new and fresh attorneys, especially in doing rural legal work? Are there any benefits to being young and fresh, or are we just naive?"

John: The benefit is that you're young and fresh. I can see where we need to go, but I don't have all the legal research for how to get there. I don't always have all the energy to get us there, but you guys do. I can tell you, hey, can you go research this and this and this? This is where we're trying to go. Then you see where we're trying to go, and you can row our ship to that place. That's really the benefit. You guys are the workforce. When you first get out of school, you are the workforce for the team.

Samantha: I see one of the benefits too. I think, Mary, you said this earlier: we lose a lot, and it can be very disheartening, so you have to have your resiliency measures in place. I think that you can get jaded. I saw this when I first became an attorney, even though I wouldn't necessarily say I was young at that time. I was fresh, but I saw attorneys who had been in it for twenty and twenty-five years, and there was very much a lot of jadedness. I feel like that can happen because we lose a lot, but I think it's the optimism that you could bring to it for those of you who are young.

You bring a kind of energy that can help those of us who have been doing it for a long time. You can fall in love again with your work, and you can realize why you're doing it. There is hope because I didn't win, I didn't have my first success on the merits for years, and so I had brought, at least, ten NEPA cases, if not more, and then had finally had a win and finally started winning.

Then that kind of reenergized me. I think it's the excitement and optimism that you all can bring to it that can really help those of us who have been in it for a while to reengage on the issues, and also, you bring different ways of looking at issues, and that's just a benefit. I see that very much as a benefit. In terms of learning, it means getting to the point where you feel you know what you're doing. That's why they call it practice. You have to do it a bunch of times. You

may have to lose a bunch of time and reimagine the strategy that you want to use or rework. I see a tremendous benefit for new people coming into the profession.

Tanmay: One quick thing I would add to it is, I think that precisely because this is such a hard field where we lose a lot, this is just my thinking, but I think every ten or twelve years, the existing generation of environmental lawyers learn to make certain compromises and the new generation, I think, comes in and bursts those compromises and says, “Okay, actually, I think we can push the envelope a little bit further. We don’t have to compromise on these issues.”

I think that’s something that within my organization, also, I see it happening a lot. Just between the older lawyers and the younger lawyers. I guess the suggestion is: be very bold when you take your first job and push your seniors because maybe part of being jaded is just accepting that there are some battles you won’t win when maybe that’s not true.

Mary: I’ll just add. This is all— I agree with all of it, but the other little, tiny piece of it, as I mentioned, a lot of the work I do overlaps with traditional environmental law. There may be an environmental law component, but after looking at it, it’s like, oh, actually, there’s this property rights issue that’s from some property case. I think that as newbie attorneys right out of law school, you have a much broader understanding of the concepts of practicing in various fields of law. I think that can really, at least for the law I practice, that’s the breadth of understanding that I think people will lose over time, and I think that’s something that you really bring to the table.

Anna: We really appreciate all those responses. It’s good to keep in mind as we transition out from being a student to a practitioner, and then I think along that line and what has been said already on this panel. What are some general values and goals that should be at the forefront of your practice when you’re working with these communities and in these more public-interest roles?

What are the central values and goals that should be at the forefront when you’re working with these communities and in more public interest roles? In big law firms, for example, it’s producing work, serving the businesses you’re serving, but I have to believe it’s different in public interest roles.

Mary: I’ll just start by saying that I think the work that I do with communities is really about listening to the community and making sure that you’re not putting your voice above theirs. Making sure that what you’re doing is lifting up what their goals are. Make sure that you’re listening and understanding their goals, that you’re not talking over them, and that you’re allowing them to speak in all of the heinous principles and pieces of that. I think that’s really, really critical to working in any kind of marginalized community.

Samantha: I think it’s also worth thinking about. It’s not always about the legal win. That’s a big thing in the public interest. Environmental law, too, states that sometimes a loss can have other benefits, particularly with getting some community engagement and getting some engagement from politicians. It’s not quite the same as just resolving a contract issue. It can be the legal strategy, like in the work I do; it’s a piece of a much broader strategy, a much bigger desire to

make a big impact change. It can sometimes be narrow and broad and part of something else. I just found that in the work I do, losing a case, there are other pieces that go along with that, and so it's just not always about the win.

PARTING ADVICE

Anna: Thank you so much for those reflections. We're winding down on our time. We have just one last relatively open-ended question, which is just if you can offer any parting advice to many soon-to-be graduates on our first years out in the real world. Be it really granular—like an excellent writing tip or how to maintain your motivation—any piece of advice that you'd like to share with us?

Estella: I can start. I've been doing this for about ten years, and I'm currently directly supervising some really new attorneys. The thing that struck me the most was how overwhelming it can feel to start off. To be a brand-new attorney, you feel like you don't know what you're doing. You feel lost for, or I should say, I felt lost for the first probably five years. It takes a long time to gain that level of confidence in yourself.

I would say, even if you, which a lot of people are—they're very smart. They're very driven. They're very dedicated. They're willing to put in the time, and I just feel it's so different actually being out in practice, and in some ways, it's a lot better because it's not theoretical. It's very practical, and you actually discover that you don't have to have all the answers. You can look them up in books, which was shocking to me. I thought I just had to have everything in my head. That was really scary, but it's also about figuring out what kind of attorney you want to be, what practices you want to have, what relationships you want to build, and what reputation you want to start building for yourself because you will have a reputation.

The lawyering community is very small, really. It really is, especially if you work within a specific field and build a really positive reputation. I don't mean winning cases. I mean being really useful and thorough to clients and making sure that you listen to them and are meeting their goals, and hopefully, those will align with the goals that you have set. That's really, really important, and that's going to follow you throughout your legal career no matter where you go. There's just no way other than through it for the first couple of years, and that's really scary. You just have to be used to being uncomfortable for the first few years.

Not everybody has that experience. Some people have very positive experiences where they just hit the ground running, but that was my experience. It's just really hard to have that confidence when you're coming across opposing counsel that's been doing it for fifty years. Those are literally all the attorneys that I come into contact within the agricultural world. They've all been doing it for fifty years, and they started being an attorney before I was born, and they talk the talk, but then it comes down to it.

Then you get your first motion for summary judgment or your first brief in writing, and you're reading it, and you're like, "Oh my God. This person has a lot of experience. I feel so intimidated." Then you read it, and you're like, "Gosh." They're just a bunch of idiots. They don't know what they're talking about. I'm a second-year attorney. I know that over time. Anyway, I will never forget that.

During the second year that I was in practice, some attorney who was very well known within the agricultural employer community sent me cases over time. He cited a case from 1914, which often can be fine, depending on what you're citing it for, but he was talking about basically being able to pay weekly over time instead of daily overtime and daily wages for years in California. I was like, "I really don't think this guy knows what he's talking about."

It was an emotion. It was related to an attorney's fees dispute that we were having. We ended up getting \$50,000 in attorney's fees. You'll see that happen. You'll get something in writing; it looks really intimidating, but then you actually delve into it. I really don't think they know what they're talking about, or my arguments are better, and that's what I'm going to focus on, or my facts are better, or just the cause that I'm working for is better.

That's what gets you through the drudgery or just the intimidation or sheer complexity of whatever it is that you're doing. Don't be discouraged by that. I have to tell my new attorneys that I get the sense that they're very discouraged by that, and I had people tell me that when I was coming up. I try to tell them that and just remind them about that. It just takes a little while, but you're very smart, probably smarter than half the attorneys that you will ever come across because I don't really care.

In all honesty, I think the thing that sets you apart is that you care about the communities you're working with and that you care about advancing true justice, not in the name of making a lot of money. That just sets you apart. That's what, in my opinion, has seen me through some difficult times within my legal career. Hopefully, that will see you through challenges that are inevitable, and that's just part of life.

Samantha: I would say, too, from a different aspect, look for a good mentor. If your manager, whoever that is, is just handing stuff off to you and putting you in a corner and not tending to your professional development, you need to either try to be managed by somebody else, find someone else within where you're working to do that, or find a different job where you can get a manager who is really going to tend to your professional development.

Because my initial experience when I was with that partnership was there was really no mentoring that was going on. I didn't really get that until I went over to WildEarth Guardians and their legal director, who had been a professor at the DU Law Clinic, so I felt like he knew how to work with somebody who was new. I just felt like he was mentoring me. He was explaining things to me before we would get on a call with opposing counsel. He's like, "This is what I think is going to happen. This is what you can say." He did a lot of that.

Whereas the first place I worked, she'd say, "Okay, we're going to have this phone call." Wouldn't explain to me what the case was about. Afterwards, I would sit and wait for a debrief and for her to walk me through what had happened. She was like, "Okay, go back to work." You should really expect that. You should expect to be mentored or developed professionally, and that's a reasonable expectation for a new attorney. I would say, "Oh, well, I somehow don't deserve that. It's unrealistic for me to expect this person to be helping develop me as an attorney," because it's really not. For a good manager, that will be part of how they manage you.

Mary: Sam, you literally stole exactly what I was going to say. I'm going to say it, too. Mentors are incredibly important, and they're not a guarantee. Especially if you're going into public interest law, we're often really, really busy. We're often really small. You might not get that from your supervisor, but you can reach out and find an attorney you know who is doing the kind of work that you want to do and develop a relationship with them and try to let them be your mentor. It's not always going to work out that your supervisor is your mentor, and you need to look for somebody.

John: I would encourage a new attorney to be very clear when you're hired to set boundaries in terms of your work-life balance. I'm a recovered alcoholic, and so I've been sober for years. Before that, it was all or nothing, just 100 miles an hour or nothing. I would just work incredible hours, and that is not healthy. I really encourage you to be very clear. You want me to work forty hours per week. You want me to work fifty hours per week.

Just be very clear, because it's so important that we take care of ourselves. Before we take care of any community, before we take care of any client, anything, we have to take care of ourselves. As much as it's going to be tempting to work long hours to finish up that brief to make it amazing, just take care of yourself and be good to yourself, and then you take care of everyone else after that.

Tanmay: I totally agree with that. I'd say two things. One is I'm not a very extroverted person. I don't really know how to network half the time. One of the ways in which I ensured that I kept track of the big picture in terms of my career goals was by having a friend from law school, and we talked every month about how we felt about our jobs. I found that extremely useful because you can be frustrated about things, or you can be so deep in some project that you forget where you are in your career.

Just talking once a month and articulating how you're feeling, it's good. It helps you realize if you have toxic coworkers or if there's something that you thought in law school you'd really want to do, litigate, well instead you're just not doing that part, and so you haven't met that aspect of your career aspirations. That's, I think, a low-pressure way of making sure that you get something that mentors give.

The second thing that I would say is that when you feel lost and when you feel under-confident, try to very explicitly find ways to take ownership of what

you're doing. If you're sitting there and thinking, "Oh, so many people are depending on me, but I'm just useless." That's really what's happening: you recognize a cognitive obligation, but the rest of your mind is not really feeling it. Go out and talk to people, visit the place that your case is centered around, or do something else. Just go to housing court and help someone, just proofread someone, some person's brief.

Whatever it is, try to take ownership of what you are doing and use that passion, I think, to bring that to your work because legal work is dry. I think we all know that, at times, it's just so hard to try to craft the perfect sentence or find the perfect citation. It's dull work sometimes. You need to find ways to get the juices flowing. I think we're in a good position because with nonprofit lawyering, it's always just around the corner because you actually like what you're doing. Just work on that connection.

Christina: I'm going to take the liberty of speaking on behalf of Ecology Law Center, I have absolutely cherished this day with all of you. Thank you so much, Stella, Sam, Mary, John, Tanmay, from the bottom of our hearts. We really appreciate you being here. Let's give them a huge round of applause. That concludes the 2023 Ecology Law Quarterly symposium. Thank you. Anna, any parting remarks or notes for anyone?

Anna: You said it all. I'm all good to go. Thank you.

