

John Caher: Welcome to Amici, News and Insight from the New York Judiciary and the Unified Court System. I'm John Caher. Today's program is another episode of Diversity Dialogues with Susan Goodman. Today, Susan's guest is Alia Razzaq, Chief Clerk of the New York City Civil Court.

Susan Goodman: So Alia, what three words would you use to describe your current role?

Alia Razzaq: Fast-paced. Detail-oriented. Communication.

Susan Goodman: Can you elaborate on one or more of those?

Alia Razzaq: Yes. I'll start with communication. In the role of Chief Clerk, the court as a whole serves members of the public, people looking to access the court for whatever reason. In addition to having a responsibility to communicate or delegate the necessary communications to the members of the public, I feel like I also serve my principals, who are the Administrative Judge and Deputy Chief Administrative Judge and the higher-ups in the Office of Court Administration. I serve the employees who are our subordinates. It's necessary for me to communicate and, in my opinion, communicate skillfully, ensuring that I transmit messages that are understood and/or directions that are understood and followed.

Susan Goodman: Do you want to talk about fast-paced, because that sounds like it's kind of a corollary to what you were just talking about.

Alia Razzaq: Fast-paced, similar to the world outside. The needs of the court are ever-changing. In the interest of excellence and supporting and following Judge DiFiore's Excellence Initiative, we are trying to stay as up-to-date as we can with technology while meeting the needs of the court users and providing access to justice that they seek when they arrive here.

There are changes in rules and laws that don't change as frequently, however require us to, on occasion, change procedure and transmit that information to any of our necessary personnel. Our staffing continues to change. We're in a court where we have competitive employees. We're happy and proud when they promote but when they promote, they leave a vacancy. There are people that are retiring. So attrition is big for us and we still have to adjust when there's attrition for whatever reason. We just have to stay on top of things. We have to ensure that we're accurate. We have to correct errors. All of that.

And on our civil side, I know calendars are overloaded and so in order to get through a regular workday, we have to move with speed, efficiency, and accuracy.

Susan Goodman: Great. That's very compactly said and interesting. What would you say you like most about your job and what are you most passionate about what you do?

Alia Razzaq: I would say on a regular day, Alia is an introvert. I say that, however, my work and responsibilities make me an introverted extrovert. One of my favorite parts of the job is actually talking to people. As I was promoted within civil court, the higher ranking I was promoted to, the less my interaction with people, especially court users ... So what I miss the most is the people. I started in the court at a window services assignment and I fancy myself an expert at that and enjoyed people walking away satisfied with the service. When people enter into a court as a petitioner, respondent, plaintiff, or defendant, chances are someone's going to win this and someone's going to lose this and either way it goes, to be able to do that and receive services with respect and dignity, whether it's an allegation that you owe rent or someone is suing you for money, or you have to recover something from someone, on either side, my feelings are the person is entitled to the the respect, and the dignity and I'd like to see that they get that.

Susan Goodman: Great. Just moving to the whole topic of diversity. How would you define diversity in your own words?

Alia Razzaq: A composition of various people from various walks of life.

Susan Goodman: How do you encourage people to honor the uniqueness of each of their diverse selves?

Alia Razzaq: I encourage people to respect that we are all citizens of the world and respect that as citizens of the world we might come from different cultural backgrounds, we might come from different communities, we may have different religions, we may not have religions at all, to be respectful. I'd say to be respectful.

Susan Goodman: And how do you encounter it on a day-to-day basis in your own work?

Alia Razzaq: In my own work, now ... I would say in the past I've encountered an expectation that I fit two minorities and therefore there was no expectations of me at all I've had individuals, not the court system as a whole or my work environment as a whole, but I've had individuals ... I received it and have, I believe, followed through with showing that I'm a hard worker. If I don't know the answer, I'm going to provide the answer. And have had people who have had that thought come back to me and say they were wrong. And that was good for me. That was good for my colleagues.

Susan Goodman: Have you had any mentors that have been particularly important to you along the way?

Alia Razzaq: I would say I've had several mentors. I look at each and every person that I was subordinate to as a mentor in some sort of way, whether I observed and made

an unqualified assessment at the time of their professional behavior as something that I wouldn't do if I ever promoted, or if I were in their shoes how I wouldn't handle something. And then I've had great mentors in the form of managers or supervisors who neither they nor I felt that I was going to promote to this position but just in teaching, in sharing, have given me so much with regard to the role of a supervisor, manager, administrator in the court system.
Susan Goodman:

I was able to give ideas and they were considered. I volunteered and it was successful. I was able to liaison not just between criminal court and civil court but with the outside agencies, the Center for Court Innovation, New York City Housing Authority, and the judge at the time and his staff that managed the Red Hook Community Justice Center and today the housing court unit still operates from the community justice center.

Susan Goodman: That's great. That's great. How would you advise prospective applicants, since you seem to have risen and succeeded so well within the court system, how would you advise prospective applicants to the court system and/or those who wish to advance within it?

Alia Razzaq: What I would advise is to: A. Learn your duties and your responsibilities and become proficient in them and do a good job. Whether it's communicating with the public, whether it's moving papers and processing warrants or judgments. Whatever your job is, do it well. With regard to communicating with people, just imagine that each and every communication we have at work is an interview. You are showing who you are to that panel or to that person that might be selecting you for a job. You never know who you're speaking to and when you're going to meet them again. And for that reason, it's always important to put your best foot forward. Give your best you. Working in the courts where, again, when the people walk into the building, whether they're a petitioner, respondent, plaintiff, defendant, it's quite possible that there's something they might lose. And we don't often know the people on the other side of the window.

We don't often know the users of the court so there are occasions where are people that are frustrated. They're people that are anxious and their tone may be, on occasion, a little challenging, but it's not personal. There's nothing personal there and so it's for us to be empathetic, to be understanding, to be patient and to hear what's going on with the person on the other side of the window.

Susan Goodman: That's great advice-

Alia Razzaq: And it's going to go well. And then lastly for me, I share with my staff that I have in some other environment might be called nosy, but when I'm at work and being introduced to a new assignment, I term myself as professionally curious. It's important for me to learn, not just what my role is, and without stepping on toes of my colleagues, learn what's going on around me I didn't want to pigeon-hole myself into one assignment and it helped me to learn what's going on

around me. It helped me with regard to volunteering if there's a project going on.

Also, if you have a hidden talent, though we might not be able to utilize it on a Wednesday morning when we're trying to resolve crowds in our waiting areas and lobbies, we're always open for suggestions and I think that if you have a background where you're into digital technology and you realize that we're way behind the times and have some ideas, please submit them.

Susan Goodman: That's well said. And just finally, before you leave this position, what would you like your greatest achievement to be?

Alia Razzaq: I would like my greatest achievement to be communicating to anyone that's interested that this seat that I'm sitting in is achievable for anyone and I believe that I achieved it by working hard, by communicating well, and nothing is impossible.

I started in the court system as a grade 16 I didn't move around in the courts with regard to professional opportunities. I spent the majority of my career here at civil court. And I think that as employees, we owe it to ourselves to seek each and every promotional opportunity that exists. We owe it to our families. And at the end of the day when we retire, the higher you promoted, the better it is for you. The end game is better.

Susan Goodman: That's great. I really appreciate you're talking to us today, Alia. It was very inspiring to hear what you had to say. Really. I feel inspired.

Alia Razzaq: Thank you!

Susan Goodman: And thank you again for your patience.

John Caher: Thanks for listening to Amici. You'll find all of our recent podcasts on the court system's website at www.nycourts.gov. Most are also on the iTunes Podcast Library. If you have a suggestion for an Amici podcast, please let me know. I'm John Caher and I can be reached at 518-453-8669 or jcaher@nycourts.gov. In the meantime, stay tuned.