

**I**n preparing my remarks, I spent time thinking about what I would have wanted to know when I was in your shoes, and one of the things I asked myself before I went to law school was “Will it be worth it?”

I have been out of law school for long enough to see its impact on my life over a series of years. I won’t get too specific because as a woman it’s in my best interest to keep my age somewhat ambiguous, but when I started law school, Facebook was actually cool, Blockbuster was still a place that existed, Netflix had not started streaming, and iPhones did not exist. To be fair, they existed by the time I graduated from law school, so it’s totally fine. I’m not that old. Since I began law school, some things about the world have definitely changed, as they tend to do. But I can truly say that in all that time, my law degree has been only a positive. There are many reasons for this, but here I will focus on just a few.

**Law school gave me the chance to develop a type of confidence in myself that I didn’t know I could have.**

Easy example: working as a lawyer has put me in many high-pressure situations where mistakes can be fairly catastrophic. That. Is. Stressful. But I learned I could do it. Every single day, I kept doing it. After enough time, I built a kind of confidence that I could only gain from showing up to an office week after week and year after year, getting asked to do things that I definitely did not know how to do, figuring out (often frantically) how to do them, and, yes, sometimes falling on my face, but then dusting myself off and moving on. While unpleasant, I learned that fall-



## Forging Your Own Path

BY MARIE HOWICK, '09

*Ms. Howick is head legal of radioligand therapy for a multinational pharmaceutical corporation. This article is adapted from remarks she delivered at BYU's annual Women in Law Luncheon on January 27, 2022.*

ing on my face usually wasn't as bad as I had feared, and it turned out that, more often than not, I wasn't a complete disaster. I succeeded, and it felt good.

You deserve the chance to find out what you are capable of and to see how far you can go. Law school is one way to do that.

It is also important to note that confidence does not erase doubt. All of us doubt ourselves sometimes. Law school and

working as a lawyer will not cure that. But they will help you stand up to your inner doubts, which will put you in a better and stronger position to have a seat at the proverbial table, whatever you want that table to be—and that is never a bad thing.

**Law school empowered me.**

Law school empowered me in ways that nothing else could.

At its simplest, it gave me more options. It gave me more chances to control how my life would go. None of us can control everything. (I've tried, and it is, unfortunately, impossible.) But we can control some things. My law degree has allowed me to pursue goals and shape my life in ways that are interesting, exciting, meaningful, and important to me.

Some of you may be asking, “What does that life look like for a Latter-day Saint woman? What if I want a family? How do I do that?” These can seem like such hard questions. But I finally realized that the answer is easy. Very few things in life are easy. In 2022, this one is easy. How do you do it? *You do it however it works for you.* What does that life look like? *It looks however you want it to look.* That's it. There's no one way to do it. There's nothing you have to do nor are there any limits you have to place on yourself. You can live the life you want, how you want.

If you can choose your own path, though, does that mean you have to foresee the whole trail right now? Not at all; in fact, the opposite can be true.

Several months ago Megan Hellerer, a career coach, was a guest on the podcast *The Best Advice Show*. She advised letting go of “destinational thinking,” which involves things like 10-year plans and reverse engineering a path based on others' success and then putting your head down and making it happen. Instead she recommended “directional thinking,” in which you focus on the direction you want to go (as opposed to the destination), which allows for change and growth and accepting not being able to see the entire road ahead.<sup>1</sup> Hellerer

summed up the idea with a quote by writer E. L. Doctorow: “It’s like driving a car at night: you never see further than your headlights, but you can make the whole trip that way.”<sup>2</sup>

This concept expresses something I have always felt. I’ve never known exactly what my future would look like. By the way, I still don’t. This is not something that you just

I didn’t know how taking six months of unpaid leave would impact my career. I wasn’t guaranteed a job after the leave. I didn’t know if I’d want to go back in six months. But I knew I wasn’t ready to give up on my career just yet. I knew my general direction: I knew I wanted some sort of career in the law, even though I didn’t know exactly what that meant.

duties. There have been evolutions over the years, but by the time we had three kids, I took two days at home, he took two days at home, and the kids spent one day in childcare at my office or with a babysitter.

My law firm had on-site childcare, which some of the big firms have, and so for several years my kids came to work with me once or twice a week. On the days the kids came to work with me, my husband would drop us off at my office on his way to work. After work, my husband would pick us up and we would all drive home

ways. Your parameters won’t be identical. Your options, opportunities, circumstances, goals, and desires will be different. But fundamentally, a law degree can open doors that would otherwise be closed—doors that we don’t even know exist until we walk through them.

I’m going to close with a quote from Mindy Kaling, because all of us should probably always end our remarks by quoting Mindy Kaling. She is an excellent example of someone who has forged her own path. She gave this address in 2018 at Dartmouth, which was 17 years after she herself graduated from the school. She said:

*... a law degree can open doors that would otherwise be closed—*

*doors that we don’t even know exist until we walk through them.*

solve and then it’s over. This method is figuring out life one step at a time. But as we determine what we want to aim for, sometimes magic can happen.

### **Law school guided me to a career that can evolve.**

I’ll give you an example from my own life, because even though our paths are not going to be the same, I recognize that it can still be helpful to hear about what other women have done.

After graduating from BYU Law School, I worked at a big law firm in New York City for a while before I had my first baby. Through my firm, I had about six months of paid maternity leave. After six months, I wasn’t ready to go back to work, but I also wasn’t ready to call it quits completely. So I asked my firm if I could take six months of unpaid leave. Doing something like that might have been difficult at a small company, but in this case the churn of big law worked to my advantage, and my absence didn’t leave a gaping hole.

A few months later, I began to see a path. I’ll skip over the details (don’t be fooled: there were many logistics and some hurdles to figure out), but eventually things fell into place. I went back into the office three days a week, worked from home one day a week, and theoretically had Fridays off. It was big law and often I ended up doing at least some work on Fridays, but I almost always did that work from home, and I could largely do it on my own schedule. Sometimes it was at 2 a.m., but that was worth it to me to maintain some flexibility during the day.

Long story short, my husband and I have—day by day and year by year—figured out our own path for our family. It is one in which my husband has taken an equal share in all parenting

together. I’m sure it was quite the sight to see us fastening our kids in their car seats as fast as we could while my husband was double-parked in Midtown Manhattan, and some of my colleagues who happened to leave at the same time I was wrangling three kids through the revolving door undoubtedly thought I looked absurd. But even so, our weekly family commutes to and from Midtown in rush-hour traffic ended up being a beautiful part of our days. Again, it was far from perfect, but those commutes together were their own kind of magical. (My daughter in the audience is for sure rolling her eyes, but it’s true.)

I recognize that there were several privileges in this scenario that were unique to my situation, and I was extremely fortunate in many different

*I was not someone who should have the life I have now, and yet I do. I was sitting in the chair you are literally sitting in right now and I just whispered, ‘Why not me?’ And I kept whispering it for seventeen years; and here I am, someone that this school deemed worthy enough to speak to you at your commencement.*

*Don’t let anyone tell you that you can’t do something, but especially not yourself. Go conquer the world. Just remember this: Why not you?<sup>3</sup>*

### NOTES

- 1 Megan Hellerer, “Directional Thinking with Megan Hellerer,” August 25, 2021, in *The Best Advice Show*, hosted by Zak Rosen, podcast, [bestadvice.show/episodes/directional-thinking-with-megan-hellerer-625](https://bestadvice.show/episodes/directional-thinking-with-megan-hellerer-625).
- 2 E. L. Doctorow, “The Art of Fiction No. 94,” interview by George Plimpton, in *The Paris Review*, no. 101 (Winter 1986): 29.
- 3 Mindy Kaling, Dartmouth College commencement address, June 10, 2018, [home.dartmouth.edu/news/2018/06/2018-commencement-address-mindy-kaling-01](https://home.dartmouth.edu/news/2018/06/2018-commencement-address-mindy-kaling-01).