

## Inspirational Legal Women Podcast Series

### Episode 6

Alessandra Nascimento Silva e Figueiredo Mourão

6 May 2025



**Sara Carnegie (SC):** I'm here today to speak with Alessandra Nascimento Mourão, a Brazilian lawyer who it's been my absolute pleasure to get to know over the last few years since I started working at the International Bar Association.

It's great to speak with you again, Alessandra, and I'm delighted you're taking part in our Inspirational Legal Women podcast series, which celebrates some of our incredible members and their achievements and career in the legal profession.

By way of introduction, you're a Brazilian lawyer and founding partner of Nascimento e Mauro, a law firm based in São Paulo, and in addition, I know you lecture at universities in both Portugal, in Lisbon, and in Brazil, notably on negotiation, so you divide your time between those countries. And I think it's fair to say based on the books and articles that you've written, you can be described as something of a negotiation expert. I know you even wrote an audiobook on everything you need to hear about negotiation. So, clearly a specialist subject.

We're going to hear more about your career in a few moments, but I should acknowledge that you've been heavily involved with the IBA for many years, including senior roles in the Professional Ethics Committee and in the Section on Public and Professional Interest, and we're hugely grateful for your leadership in this regard.

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We're here to talk today about what you've done, some of the challenges and experiences you've had, and any advice that you may have for those entering or navigating their own career in law. So, thank you for joining us, Alessandra.

**Alessandra Nascimento Mourão (ANM):** Well, Sarah, I am the one to thank you for having me here. I mean, it was such a great honour and a surprise, actually, to be considered as an inspirational legal woman because we have so many within the IBA. So really, thank you, for having me here today to share some of my experiences with our audience.

**SC:** Thank you. We're delighted you're here, and I'm really looking forward to hearing about what you've done and how you've managed it all, because you really have done a lot. And I think if we start at the beginning, it'd be great to hear about what motivated you to pursue a career in law, and how you got into the type of law that became your specialism.

**ANM:** In the environment in Brazil, the educational environment, you were supposed to choose your whole life career when you were 17. And of course, I was in many doubts by then, but my mom was my biggest inspiration because she divorced when I was very young and she had to work in order to raise two kids all by herself, but she always wanted to study law. So, she was 36 when she finally got a degree in law and that was very inspirational to me and so I always lived with law books around me and my mom studying trying to go up in her career. So, she started as a court clerk but every day I would wake up in the morning no matter how early it was – five in the morning, six in the morning – I would find her studying law. So, that's where the whole thing came. She always told me that we could, you know, do better in life if we tried hard. And law was something that brought us to develop the fairness of society, fighting for justice. So, it was always there, Sara, for me. So, it was kind of a natural path.

Although as a teenager, I decided, no, I'm not going to do it, but later on I had different thoughts and decided that that would probably be my way. But I tried. I never knew after, you know, you were so young, you're 17, 18, if it would work.

**SC:** And what type of law did your mother practise?

**ANM:** She became a prosecutor. In Brazil in order to become a prosecutor you need some years of graduation and then you take a national test so you compete with thousands of people and

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if you have a better grade then you may become one. And so here she was a federal prosecutor until she died, until she passed away she was and she wanted me to be a prosecutor as well and that part I would not fulfil of her plans because that was never really for me to be a prosecutor.

Because of her early divorce in a time when women would not divorce, of course, we went through several social challenges and financial challenges, so I had to go to public school all my life. Early schools, my high school, and even my university had to be public in order for me to have the education, but lucky me, public universities in Brazil are considered to be the best ones. So, I was lucky enough to have good education all the way through. It made it possible for me even to get a scholarship and live in the US for a whole year during my high school years.

So, going to the states when I was 16 to 17 was a very important experience because it then showed me that I could go beyond my island. Why do I say 'beyond my island'? Because I lived in an island in Brazil by then; Santos is a big island but it's an island and going to the states opened my eyes to other possibilities, which also took me to practise international law. So, it all started when I was in high school.

And when I finished law school, I started my firm with my ex-husband, actually. I had this boyfriend in law school like many people and we became partners and we become husband and wife. And then we became former husband and wife and former partners. And when he left the firm, I had this sole practice myself. But the funny thing is that this ex-husband of mine, he always needed guidance when studying, and he wanted also a public position. He wanted to be a public lawyer, he wanted to work for the government, he wanted to work for the state. And so what I did, I applied to the same test in order to study with him but the funny thing is he didn't pass, and I passed. I became a government lawyer and a sole practitioner at the same time when we divorced, when we finished our partnership at the firm.

So, I was a sole practitioner and a government lawyer, and then my academic career started as well. And then when I started my career, I decided to start by practising litigation and studying litigation, but it was a big frustration. I wasn't really happy doing litigation and then, that's when I started to get interested in negotiation skills and ADRs – alternative dispute resolution issues – and that's where my academic life took me. I became a negotiation professor at the university in Brazil. And then the university in Brazil, the Fundação Getulio Vargas, started a relationship with a Portuguese institution, Universidade Católica Portuguesa. And then I started teaching here in Portugal, where I am at the moment as we record this session. And then in the middle of all this, there was this transaction and during this transaction, I had the opportunity to meet people from the Greenberg Traurig law firm. And they were very much involved with the IBA, very much, and they invited me for a cocktail party in Boston in 2013 because of the IBA conference in Boston. And then I decided, well, since I'm going to Boston for the cocktail, why don't I join the conference? And that's how I got to the IBA.

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In the very beginning, it was kind of crazy to see all this business card exchanges and not understanding what's going on. But then when I found out what the whole, the organisation was all about, I totally fell in love with the period and the mission and the values. And then my international career became even more powerful, my relationships, the relationships that I created through the IBA. I know it's not a marketing podcast for the IBA, but I must really recognise that it was like a very turning point in my career joining the IBA. That's when it really became a more international career. So, in a nutshell, that's pretty much how I ended here.

There's another thing I should share with you, is that I'm lucky enough to have very nice people crossing my path and the second very nice people that crossed my path was my actual husband. I met him while I was a government lawyer and when he saw me so unhappy with litigation, said, well, you're so happy with negotiation, why don't you go to Harvard and study deeply and come back and start your academic? And later on he became my partner and so he's the co-founder of the firm and he was always there helping me you know splitting my time between academy and in the work at the firm, so that was a big, you know, having a real partner, a professional partner, because first he was my professional partner and then we became husband and wife. So, it's a long story, Sara.

**SC:** That's a story to have over a glass of wine at a later point, I think.

So, I mean I think what you're coming to is this sense of personal life support, but also simultaneously professional because he happens to be your work partner as well.

**ANM:** And I also have partners, Sara, who had problems in their firms because they also wanted to be professors, that later on joined us because our firm would support their academic life as well. So this is another thing, there are firms that do not support, that do believe that you can split your time in a balanced way, and we do believe so. And we do believe that our professionals become of better quality, when they are also involved with the academy. They are not only practitioners, but they deeply understand the matters that they deal with.

**SC:** And what would you say has been the biggest challenge in your career so far?

**ANM:** Well, what you just mentioned; managing time, because I'm always so interested in doing so many things. This is my problem, actually. I'm always interested in so many other things that sometimes I had to make choices and my most difficult choice was to give up my government role. It was the most stable financial work I was doing. But I had the academy, I had my family, I

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started having kids and I had a firm and plus my government position, it was just too much for 24 hours a day. So, my biggest challenge was to decide which one I'm going to give away and some friends of mine, they just told me, you are crazy, you're going to just give up the most stable financial option you have in your career. And I said, well, it's limiting the others because, you know, working for the government, needing to stay in Sao Paul, most of the time, was really limiting the orders. And there has not been one day, Sara, that I woke up and regretted the decision. It gave me the opportunity really to open my eyes to other possibilities and I'm very happy to have chosen to work on my own firm, values, mission, principles in the academy.

**SC:** Do you think, I mean, again, you've mentioned working both in academia, as well as your own firm and government, and they're all different working environments. Have you found any challenges in working in particularly male-dominated environments? And as a woman, have you had to deploy any types of strategy or technique to reinforce your credibility? Well, I have decided

**ANM:** Well, I have decided to ignore male domination. I just pretended we're not male and female; we're just professionals. The way I did it all my life made things so much easier for me. It was pretty much like I haven't given them room to do any anything because I just ignored the fact that we are male and females in the room.

**SC:** I like that. Because it just then it's you. It's you, it's not whether it's a woman or a man, it is just you and your credibility and your ability.

**ANM:** Because Sara, I had difficult experience with female professionals, very tough and difficult. So, it was always there. It's me and them, regardless of the fact that we were talking to men and women, it made things easier for me.

**SC:** I know we live in a world where certain professions are perhaps more dominated by one gender or the other and that is the perception in law certainly and that's the data that we see in our studies but still, we can experience difficulties with other women as well I think is the point that several people have said to me and spoken about and I think that's something that perhaps we don't want to ignore. We should all be lifting as you climb, as Deborah Enix-Ross said. When she spoke to me recently, I thought that motto is something I kind of want it up there in lights.

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I'm interested in how you think, particularly younger people, but those who perhaps you work within your law firm, remain inspired by law, given the challenges that we face in society and in today's environment, particularly in the context of ethical considerations. And I know you were very heavily involved, and perhaps still are, with the Professional Ethics Committee of the IBA. I just wonder if you can say a few words about that and how you approach those issues and offer guidance and inspiration to those around you.

**ANM:** Well, you're right, I'm very involved still with the Professional Ethics Committee and I'm a member of the advisory board, and I am actually organising the 2026 conference here in Lisbon so you're invited to join us. And as a founding partner, I think about succession all the time. So, I'm always paying attention to my young talents at the firm. And I easily see how proud they are to work at the firm when they have a role model, someone who invests time and knowledge in ethics like I do. So, it's very important that every time we have an ethical issue at the firm that we talk about it openly and they see in practice that we make the ethical choices, not necessarily the financial, the best choices for the firm.

One thing is to talk about ethics. The other thing is to practise and they know you must be authentic. The young ones, they know if you are playing ethical or if you're practising ethical. I'm very happy to see that our turnover at the firm is very low because they become proud of what they do. Although we have to be aware of the fact that they are paid the average of the market, so that they stay at the firm, but it's not only that. They want to be proud of what they're doing, they must admire the leaders of the firms, and I see that it works. At least in my experience, it's been working. And even the clients like it. The clients like that we don't have a high turnover. So in the end of the day, Sara, it's good for the business.

**SC:** To close, it's really good hearing about your experience and the way that you've made decisions and choices. But I suppose the last question I'm asking everybody is whether they've got any advice on how to do it or particular ways through for younger women and other women navigating their career in the legal profession. Because we know some find it very challenging with their time, with balancing their family lives, pressures perhaps. So, do you have any suggestions or advice that you'd like to leave our listeners with?

**ANM:** Tell the others, by being a role model. I truly believe that people are working with me or want to be around me because they see what I do more than what I say. So, people, the young ones at the firm, they keep telling me that I'm an inspiration and I sometimes wonder why they think that. What have I said? And then I find out I haven't been saying much, but I've been doing a lot and they've been seeing it. And this is maybe the first thing I would tell the young ones, be

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yourself. This is the very first thing. Be yourself and take your time to make your important decisions. I see them very anxious to – very, very anxious – to do the right thing and to choose whatever will change their whole life. Just take your time to make the right decisions. There's so many options nowadays. I know in my time I already had many options and I had to make my choices, but nowadays, even within the law, there's so much they can do.

So, I would tell them to take their time to be able to enjoy their achievement of their own financial goal, but along with also the achievement of doing what makes them proud of themselves. And again, going back to watching their well-being and paying attention to what is going on in the world and opening their minds to other areas of knowledge, not thinking law all the time. Do other creative things that will help them innovate, because innovation is the key word nowadays. They can look at me, they can see where I got, but I got where I got in my time, not in their time. In their time, they will have to create their own path, their own ways.

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