

**A SHARPENED PERSPECTIVE**

# Why You Want a Pandemic Mother on Your Trial Team

By Lynne O. Ingram

In [an interview with CBS Sunday Morning](#), Justice Ginsburg discussed her three major obstacles at the start of her career.



*Photo Credit: Collection of the Supreme Court of the United States*

**RBG:** I had three strikes against me: one, I was Jewish. Two, I was a woman. But the killer was I was a mother of a four-year-old child.

**Host:** You graduated first in your class. Didn't that say something about your ability to be both a mother and the best?

**RBG:** It should have.

It should have. It should. It does.

The pandemic mother litigator successfully married and orchestrated her work and home lives during unprecedented times. Unprecedented as in no playbook, no model, no guide. She wrote the playbook on juggling two full-time jobs—parenting and lawyering—without letting any balls drop. She navigated the uncertain and emerged smarter and stronger on the other side. She cared for her family, serviced her clients, and fulfilled her obligations to her firm partners. She is exactly who you want on your trial team, guiding you through the challenging waters of litigation and adapting to all the surprises that come along with it.

## Ten traits of great litigators:

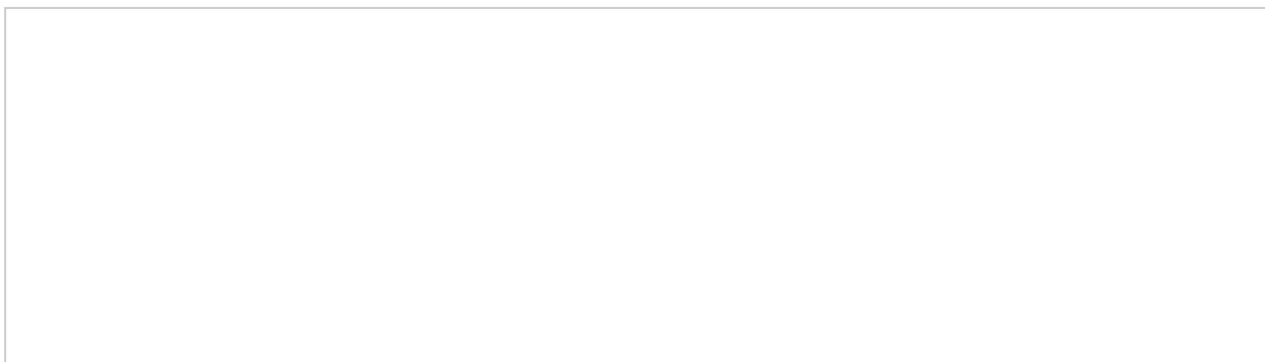
### 1. Integrity – honest, moral and principled

2. **Team player** – lifts as she climbs, celebrates her team’s successes, gives credit where due
3. **Gritty work ethic** – she will work as hard as it takes, for as long as it takes, with passion and perseverance to reach her goals
4. **Practical** – she takes a fair, rational, common sense approach
5. **Storyteller** – the ability to hold her audience’s rapt attention
6. **Good listener** – the ability to actually hear what someone is saying, and what she is not
7. **Patience** – with her discourteous adversaries, with the ever-changing landscape of litigation
8. **Excellent judgment** – she makes good decisions and knows when to seek advice
9. **Prepared** – organized and ready to take whatever comes her way
10. **Master negotiator** – she can read her adversary like an open book and close the deal

Isn't it interesting that the traits of a great litigator are also those of a great mother? For anyone who has ever held your child spellbound with your ability to spin a good yarn, negotiated afternoon snack down from sugar cookies to raw almonds, or gone through the exercise of walking your sleep training toddler back to bed eight times in one evening, you get it. Listening to what's being said is just as important as hearing what's not being said—whether it's an expert witness you are cross-examining or your child who is struggling with sharing his fears. Overpreparation will serve you well at trial, and in your diaper bag.

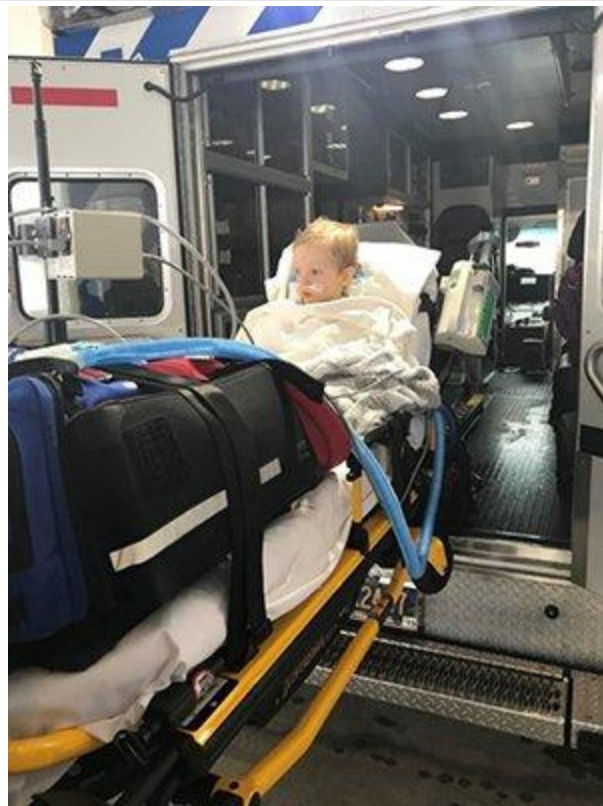
When the world went into lockdown, working mothers faced the superhuman task of juggling two full time jobs while keeping their families safe.

For my husband, Jon, and me, safety is paramount. Our son's fragile start to life informed our conservative approach to COVID and self-quarantining. Born 8 weeks early weighing 2 lbs. 10 oz., Jude spent his first 53 days in the NICU at Bryn Mawr Hospital, initially on breathing support. At 18 months, Jude was hospitalized for bronchiolitis and transferred from Bryn Mawr's ER to Nemours Children's PICU in Wilmington, DE during a snowstorm.





*August 31, 2016*



*First ambulance ride*

When Jon and I started learning more about Covid-19—lung complications, acute respiratory distress, ventilator dependency—we freaked out. Despite the fact that Jude is now a robust, thriving four-year-old, the memory of your newborn baby struggling to breathe never leaves you. We flashed right back to the NICU, with its beeping machines and high flow nasal cannulas. Jude’s early days shaped me as a mother, and that instant protective response has muscle memory. When you watch your child struggle to learn how to do things in the world that they were meant to have done in the womb, your heart aches in a way that’s indescribable. I stood guard at his Isolette, jumped at the sound of a cough or sneeze and scrubbed my hands and forearms so many times each day that they cracked and bled.

When the severity of Covid-19 became clear, we reflexively jumped into hyper-protective mode: Hours spent wiping down groceries with Clorox wipes. Having everything delivered—groceries, toilet paper, pantry staples. Not letting anyone in the house. Waking in the middle of the night to check on Jude.

The transition to pandemic life was not a graceful one. One day bled into the next as we juggled work, parenting and the obsessive wiping-down of every can of seltzer in the grocery delivery. The pace of the early lockdown days was not sustainable: Simultaneously working and parenting seven days a week, not working out and barely sleeping. When I attempted to close my eyes at night, all the emotions that I buried throughout the day rose to the surface of my consciousness: Guilt over keeping Jude from his family and friends, but being too afraid to expose him to something that could attack his respiratory system. Guilt over sticking him in front of the TV again or leaving him to play by himself for hours on end so I could work. Anxiety over managing working and parenting full-time.

I knew that to manage everything on my plate while maintaining my sanity, I needed to draw upon the skills that make me a successful litigator.

**Time Management:** I rose long before the sun to squeeze in early morning workouts over Zoom or to address the housework that didn't make the cut the day prior. I learned to shift from work task to home task and back, to accommodate the needs of my clients and my son. I scheduled meetings and phone calls around virtual home schooling on the days that Jude's school was closed for in-person education. I returned to working after family dinner, while Jon cleaned up and spent time with Jude. It wasn't always pretty, but we made it work.

**Organization:** My transition to working fully remote was pretty seamless. Given my prior travel, court appearances and other meetings out of the office, I was already doing a fair amount of work at home and had a dedicated office space. Many of my clients had travel restrictions through their companies, and expected Zoom meetings and mediations, which were easily accomplished from home. Keeping myself and my work space organized was vital to my success.



### *Mission Control*

**Communication:** You can be supremely organized, but if you don't properly communicate your plan with your team—whether your team is your spouse at home or your colleagues at work—it will inevitably fail. In these virtual times, it became critical to make sure the people I depended on were on the same page as me, and vice versa. Having Zoom meetings to check in with my litigation team, encouraging regular e-mail communication and phone calls, making sure no one felt like they were alone on an island without having support from the firm. Jon and I discussed our schedules weeks in advance to make sure we didn't both book important day-long meetings on the same date. We included each other on calendar invites for work and home events so we could both be reminded of our respective obligations.

**Flexibility:** Despite the best-laid plans, things popped up, schedules changed, and adjustments needed to be made. While Jon and I were largely able to juggle work and parenting, some days were rockier than others. There's nothing like having your four-year-old tell 100 of your colleagues over Zoom to "Say excuse me before you start talking,

Mommy.” Fortunately, it was a Women in the Law meeting, and many could relate to the comedic pitfalls of Zooming from home—if anything, they were relieved it didn’t happen to them!

**Discernment:** As September drew closer, our anxiety levels steadily crept back up. Jude was starting at a new Montessori preschool, and the final week of summer was fraught with uncertainty. Every hour, we reassessed the numbers: the Covid infection rate, confirmed cases, any data available in and around Delaware County, Pennsylvania. We went back and forth over whether to pull him from school or hire a nanny. Ultimately, we were comfortable with his school’s health and safety plan, the small class size and the school’s commitment to mask wearing, social distancing, disinfecting regularly and keeping the children as safe as possible. Jude went back to school and stayed healthy, made new friends and learned new things.

2020 was a year that tested, challenged and pushed pandemic mothers to the edge of sanity. But it was also a time of growing, learning and transforming. The pandemic forever changed us—as people, mothers, spouses, lawyers. We gained an improved skill set, an increased ability to multi-task, and a more efficient approach to managing the demands of trial. We have a sharpened perspective on balancing our clients business goals with the demands of litigation. We are who you want on your trial team. We are who you need on your trial team.



[Lynne Ingram](#) is a member of Campbell Conroy & O’Neil, P.C., in Philadelphia. A seasoned trial lawyer with a diverse civil litigation defense practice, Lynne specializes in defending catastrophic, high exposure losses, and has significant experience in matters involving gas fires and explosions. She represents clients in cases across the country, through all stages of litigation. Lynne works with clients in a broad range of industries, and her practice areas span commercial and construction litigation, mass disasters, personal injury/negligence, and premises and products liability. Prior to entering private practice, Lynne spent more than five years as an ADA in Philadelphia, where she tried over 40 felony jury trials. She is the co-chair of her firm’s Diversity Committee, is active in DRI and FDCC leadership, and volunteers at her local hospital’s NICU. Lynne lives in the Philadelphia suburbs with her husband, son and two dogs.