

Entrepreneurial Outlook

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Managing Partner
Lewis & Associates

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A Trailblazer in Canada's Legal Community

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COVER STORY

In the heart of Canada's legal community, Jacki Lewis stands as a powerful force—both as the Managing Partner of Lewis & Associates and as a passionate advocate for refugees and the LGBTQI2S community. With over four decades of experience and a 45-lawyer firm under her leadership, Jacki has built more than just a legal practice. She has cultivated a haven for those seeking justice, safety, and dignity.

Her journey didn't begin in immigration law. Jacki started out in the corporate corridors of Bay Street, but it wasn't long before she felt the pull of a more human-centered path. The drive to create meaningful change led her away from boardrooms and toward courtrooms where she could fight for the rights of individuals fleeing persecution and hardship. Refugee law became more than just a profession—it became her purpose.

What sets Jacki apart isn't just her legal acumen or the impressive scale of her firm, but the deeply personal way she connects with each client. From the beginning, her growth wasn't driven by marketing strategies or expansion plans—it was built on trust, compassion, and a commitment to treating people with the dignity they deserve. Clients often tell her, “No lawyer has ever spoken to me the way you have.” That simple but powerful sentiment is a reflection of Jacki's approach: empathetic, accessible, and unwavering.

Today, she leads one of the most respected immigration and refugee law firms in the country, yet she remains grounded in her original mission—to give hope where there was none and to change the world, one life at a time.

Bridging Academia and Advocacy

Jacki holds a Master of Laws (LL.M.) in Administrative Law—a specialization that has significantly shaped her approach to advocacy and legal representation. The advanced degree deepened her expertise in navigating the complex landscape of administrative tribunals, where many of her clients' futures are decided.

For Jacki, the LL.M. was more than an academic pursuit. It provided critical insight into the procedural frameworks and fairness requirements that govern decisions outside the traditional courtroom setting. In a legal environment where tribunals often carry the weight of life-altering outcomes, particularly in immigration and refugee matters, this understanding became a cornerstone of her practice.

Throughout her career, Jacki has viewed herself as a steadfast defender of the rule of law. Her graduate studies equipped her with the tools to interpret and challenge tribunal decisions with precision, ensuring that her clients' rights are not just acknowledged, but fully protected. This foundation has reinforced her commitment to justice, allowing her to stand firmly at the intersection of legal expertise and human advocacy.

Managing Change in a Dynamic Legal Landscape

Jacki has navigated the complexities of leadership with resilience and clarity. Yet, she candidly acknowledges that one of the most challenging aspects of running a firm of this scale—while maintaining a deep-rooted commitment to advocacy—is managing change.

From adapting to evolving legal technologies to pivoting operations during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Jacki has had to steer her team through waves of transformation. Implementing new systems, maintaining service quality, and ensuring that her lawyers stay aligned with both the firm's mission and the realities of modern practice has required constant agility.

“Sometimes, it feels like herding cats,” she admits with a smile. But it's precisely that ability to lead through chaos—with a steady focus on purpose and people—that defines Jacki's approach. Her leadership is grounded in empathy and structure, balancing the demands of firm management with the unwavering advocacy her clients have come to depend on.

“A friend refers to my dedication and work ethic as, “*Anything worth doing is worth overdoing.*”

A Historical Perspective on Refugee Law

Jacki brings both personal conviction and historical perspective to her work in refugee and human rights law. “Our refugee system was born out of the Holocaust,” she asserts, referencing the origins of the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees. “Without the Convention, we would be continuing to face a situation where boats of refugees could flee a country and a Minister, like Blair, in Canada in the 1940s, could continue to say, 'None is too many.' This was never okay with me.”

Her advocacy is not only legal—it's deeply personal. As a proud member of the LGBTQI2S community, Jacki stands on the shoulders of those who came before her, grateful for the rights hard-won by earlier generations. But gratitude alone was never enough. She recognized that the fight for equity and dignity was far from over. Motivated by that awareness, she took action—helping to develop Canada's first emergency and transitional housing project specifically for LGBTQI2S individuals seeking refuge.



Transforming Legal Cases into Human Stories

For Jacki, there is no separation between her legal career and her advocacy—they are fundamentally intertwined. As Managing Partner of a firm deeply rooted in refugee and immigration law, she views her work as both a legal responsibility and a moral imperative.

“Many of the refugee claims we handle involve individuals fleeing countries where their lives are in danger simply because of their sexual orientation,” she explains. “The ability to help these individuals find safety, dignity, and the freedom to live authentically is incredibly rewarding.”

Jacki’s dual commitment to law and advocacy creates a unique synergy at the core of her practice. Each case is not just a legal file but a life in transition—a chance to stand up for human rights and ensure that no one is denied protection because of who they are. For her, the courtroom is another front in the fight for justice, and every successful claim is a step toward a more inclusive and compassionate world.

Shaping the Future of Immigration and Refugee Law

At Lewis & Associates, Jacki is not only shaping the future of immigration and refugee law through her practice, but also through the values she instills in the next generation of lawyers. While core principles like integrity and a commitment to excellence are non-negotiable, Jacki believes there's a deeper, more human element that defines exceptional legal advocacy.

Drawing on her experience teaching Refugee Law at both Carleton University and Western University, Jacki emphasizes to her students and young associates the importance of approaching each case with compassion and respect. For her, legal training goes beyond case law and courtroom tactics—it’s about creating a space where clients feel heard, safe, and valued.

“Our motto is simple,” she shares. “If you work with us, you have a lawyer in your family.” That sentiment isn’t just branding—it’s the foundation of how she leads. By encouraging empathy, emotional intelligence, and client-centered service, Jacki is helping shape lawyers who not only uphold the law but also elevate the profession through genuine human connection.

Combating Antisemitism Through Pro Bono Legal Leadership

Jacki recalls flipping through the leather-bound *Who's Who* directories as a child—never imagining that one day, her name would appear in their pages. Being included in the prestigious publication was not just a personal milestone, but a platform that expanded her reach and amplified her mission.

“This award has brought a lot of visibility,” she reflects. “And that visibility has opened doors to new opportunities for charitable work and advocacy.”

Already a long-standing leader in the nonprofit space, Jacki has served as President of the Board of Directors for Egale Canada since 2013, championing the rights and well-being of LGBTQI2S individuals. More recently, she was approached by the TAFSIK Organization to form a pro bono legal team dedicated to combating antisemitism and all forms of hatred.

“Antisemitism remains the leading hate-related complaint in Canada—and likely across the globe,” she notes. “This invitation was both an honor and a challenge.” Rising to that challenge, Jacki assembled a 25-member legal team and is actively working to create safer, more inclusive spaces for all communities.

Where recognition has opened doors, Jacki has stepped through with purpose, using every opportunity not for personal gain, but to create impact. “Where doors open from the honor of being recognized by *Who's Who*, I will walk through with the intent on changing lives for the better,” she says—a statement that reflects not just a career, but a calling.

Guiding the Next Generation of Immigration Lawyers

Jacki offers a grounded and compassionate perspective to young lawyers aspiring to build

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careers in immigration and human rights law. Her advice comes not just from years of legal experience, but from the lived reality of working with individuals navigating profound vulnerability and upheaval.

“Be prepared to work with very vulnerable people—many of whom have never met a lawyer before, don’t speak the language, and have arrived in a new country after leaving everything and everyone they know behind,” she says. For Jacki, effective legal representation in this field requires more than legal knowledge. It demands emotional intelligence, cultural sensitivity, and a deep understanding of trauma.

She urges future advocates to look beyond the legal file and see the human being behind it. “You need to understand their emotions—not just their legal problems. You need to understand trauma and recognize how their experiences will affect them—and, in turn, how their stories may affect you.”

Perhaps most importantly, Jacki reminds young lawyers to extend grace—to their



clients and to themselves. “Neither of you is going to get everything right all the time,” she says. “But what matters is your willingness to listen, to learn, and to keep showing up with compassion.” It’s this balance of empathy and resilience that defines a meaningful and lasting career in immigration and human rights law.



Celebrating a Career of Impact and Recognition

Over the course of her distinguished career, Jacki has been recognized with several prestigious honors, including the Laura Legge Award (2020), the International Women and the Law Award from Wone Global, and the Torch-Bearer Award. Each accolade reflects a different facet of her professional impact—from her leadership in the legal field to her unwavering commitment to social justice and human rights.

The Laura Legge Award, presented by the Law Society of Ontario, stands as a significant professional milestone. “It was an honor from my profession,” Jacki reflects. “Being recognized by my colleagues is really meaningful.” Yet, when asked which recognition means the most, her answer is clear.

“The Torch-Bearer Award was more client-centered—and that’s what has always mattered

most to me,” she shares. For Jacki, success has never been defined by titles or trophies, but by the lives touched and the trust earned. This award, rooted in the voices of those she serves, affirms the core values that have guided her throughout her journey: compassion, advocacy, and a deep respect for human dignity.

Expanding Advocacy Beyond Immigration Law

Jacki has spent her career fighting for justice, but she is acutely aware of the shifting global climate. “There has been a significant change around the world where people and governments have expressed negative sentiments toward immigration and refugee populations,” she observes. “I see it becoming more difficult to travel to and obtain status in safe countries. I worry about the fate of persons who need protection from persecution not being able to receive it.”

Despite the challenges ahead, Jacki remains

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When I tell people that I’m going to retire at some point, they laugh. “Retiring to me means having two or three full-time jobs where I’m not getting paid.”

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resolute in her commitment. “I am forever an advocate,” she says. It’s a conviction deeply rooted in both personal and professional identity—one she intends to carry forward indefinitely. Inspired by her father, who worked until the age of 85, Jacki sees no end point to her involvement. “I suppose I will be like him. I will always keep my foot in the door at Lewis & Associates because I want to maintain the culture of inclusivity and acceptance.”

Her vision for leadership goes beyond legal outcomes. She is just as invested in building a workplace where people feel seen, valued, and empowered. “I want people to love where they work and what they do.”

Jacki’s advocacy stretches far beyond immigration law. From championing LGBTQI2S rights to building coalitions against antisemitism and all forms of hate, she continues to respond to the needs of the moment with urgency and compassion. “I will devote myself to causes that arise and need an advocate willing to work day and night to



leave the world in a better place than how I found it.” And with every step she takes, Jacki ensures that change is not just a goal but a legacy.