

# Thought Leader Spotlight

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As part of The Azara Group's monthly newsletter, we select a business leader to share insights about leadership, being an influencer, and career development. Our objective is to help support your ability to flourish as a leader and share what makes people thrive in business.

## Aisha Christian

General Counsel  
Rent the Runway

**Education:** Harvard Law School (JD)  
Wellesley College (B.A. in Political Science)

**Previously With:** Russell Reynolds Associates  
CNBC  
Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP  
Honorable Barrington D. Parker, Jr.

**Interesting Details:** Grew up in Manhattan in New York City; board member of Inwood House; Special Advisor and former board member of the Promise Project; took up skiing as an adult and loves to take her young son on skiing trips in Colorado.



### 1. What attracted you to your chosen field and profession?

When I was a college student studying at Wellesley College, my dream was to become a United States Senator. I wanted to go into politics to help shape American policy and the future of our nation's people. Growing up in a family where my mother was a school teacher and my father was a doctor, I learned early in life to value education. I believe that what makes this country so special is that you can be anything you want if you have wit, drive, and opportunity. But most importantly, you need a great education as the foundation for your future.

Education is the great equalizer and key to success. But if you don't have a good education, then your options are severely limited. My passion for wanting to level the playing field for all Americans was the catalyst for my wanting a career focused on education policy. Going to law school seemed like the natural precursor to a life in politics. After graduating from Harvard Law School, I decided to pursue a career in the legal profession instead. I serve the public in other ways through charitable work focused on underserved communities in New York City.

### 2. What person, opportunity, or game-changing moment had the biggest impact on your career?

Realizing the importance of being passionate about my work was a game changer. It gave me the courage and inspiration to follow my career path. Most people leaving Wall Street law firms go to banks or consulting firms. I chose to go to a media company – CNBC. My pursuit of passion is what brought me to Rent the Runway, where I'm General Counsel. To be truly successful and operate on a high level professionally, you need excitement for what you're doing. It's not just about skill or getting a nice paycheck. I love helping businesses grow. Now I get to bring my legal expertise to help a company accomplish significant business goals.

### **3. What is the biggest challenge you faced professionally? How did you overcome it?**

Most of us face the same challenge – competition. The US has a lot of great top talent at companies working daily to gain market share, especially in New York City and the tech industry. You feel a lot of pressure to be perfect in your job. You can't make mistakes. Rent the Runway is a fashion technology company. It's had great success in a short period of time and raised roughly \$126 million in venture capital. But we're a new company, which means we manage a lot of moving parts without the infrastructure of big companies. Mistakes can have bigger consequences for growth, so it's really important that I guide us towards the best decisions and that I perform at an optimal level.

When you're General Counsel, you often don't have the luxury of more time, resources, or information when making decisions. The challenge is getting comfortable with this reality experienced in any fast-paced environment. There's never going to be the perfect scenario. So you have to trust your instincts and rely on your experience. You have to leverage your good judgment to make the best decision given the circumstances. I rely on this confidence and belief in my skills as a business-savvy lawyer to provide advice and deliver results that drive growth in a competitive market.

### **4. What tools or tactics do you rely on in being a more effective leader and team member?**

Treating people the way you want to be treated is critical. So is supporting the professional development of those around you. To effectively lead and encourage people to follow you, you have a responsibility to elevate those around you. It's not just about me as I advance. Anyone who's truly successful can point to someone who helped them succeed. I learned this early in my career when I clerked for Judge Barrington D. Parker, Jr. He now serves on the US Court of Appeals in the Second Circuit. He was a great mentor to me – offering advice, guiding me, and training me as a young lawyer. I follow his example and mentor others. Leadership is about focusing on the team.

### **5. Share a story about an interesting or difficult negotiation and how you were able to gain more influence and leverage as a result.**

I can't emphasize enough the importance of preparation for any negotiation or critical meeting. When you're not prepared, you can get egg on your face. I remember working at Davis Polk. If I were going to a partner's office, I had to bring my A-Game. I had to be prepared and anticipate questions I might be asked. It's never a good feeling when you're asked something that you don't know the answer to and should have expected the question. When you're a junior lawyer, you don't always know what you should be asking yourself before walking into the room. But you learn this through experience and that overly preparing can better position you as a top performer. When your colleagues start seeing you as being excellent at what you do, you gain their respect and ultimately more influence.

### **6. What do you see as your unique value proposition and how has your personal background prepared you to excel?**

I enjoy being a lawyer, legal theory, and the law. But what often sets me apart is that I get really personal with my work. I want to know all about the product, company, and competition. Some attorneys just see themselves as the lawyer. I see myself as a true business partner that happens to have a legal background. I'm not just another smart business person in the room – I live, breath, and wash myself in the brand. My actions show this. I have a closet full of clothes, but by personally using Rent the Runway I experience what our customers does. Now I have a rotating wardrobe and regularly wear our fashions. I've even manned our customer service line. As a member of the business team, I consciously embrace what the company is doing. We are democratizing fashion for women and providing novel access to fashion. I'm a part of this mission and leading industry change. I can't be successful as the General Counsel if I don't have passion for the brand and company's goals. My passion for what I do elevates my game.

### **7. What is your proudest achievement?**

Simply put – my child. Being my son's mother is my greatest privilege. He makes me want to achieve and brings me such joy. He's the reason why I get up. I want to show him the world and experience everything with him. I thought I was "big time" living my New York City corporate life before having my child. Now I have even more purpose and my life is richer. He brings me such inspiration personally and professionally, and is my proudest achievement.