

January 23, 2021

To our community –

Thank you all for taking the time to join us, ask questions, and provide feedback during our Amplifying Female Voices Listening Session this past Tuesday. The Board and our Membership strongly believe this series of sessions is a great start to give you, our constituents, an opportunity to play an active role in our evolution as an organization.

In case you were not able to join us, or if you would like to revisit our conversation from the Amplifying Female Voices Listening Session, we've outlined the top four topics covered below. Please note that other topics were discussed, but we wanted to give you a synopsis of those we discussed the most.

**Stay tuned for details about the Court of Master Sommeliers, Americas' next Listening Session: A Conversation on Education & Examination, taking place virtually on Thursday, February 4th at 1PM Pacific.** You can register in advance for the Zoom meeting by using this [LINK](#).

As discussed during the Listening Session, we encourage you to learn more about and utilize the below resources and contacts:

- Digital Comments & Suggestion Box: <http://bit.ly/2Mk8BiL>
- Ethics Reporting Line: <http://bit.ly/2MjUD0g>
  - English Speaking: 833-373-0329
  - Spanish Speaking (Mexico): 01-800-681-5340
  - French Speaking (Canada): 855-725-0002
  - E-mail: [reports@lighthouse-services.com](mailto:reports@lighthouse-services.com)
  - Fax: (215) 689-3885
- Independent Investigator: Margaret Bell, of Lagasse Branch Bell + Kinkead-  
[MBell@lbbklaw.com](mailto:MBell@lbbklaw.com)

### **Amplifying Female Voices Listening Session Topics Recap**

#### **1. Ethics and Ethics Investigation:**

- Our third party investigator, Margaret Bell, continues to collect and assess information and tips. This new Board prioritizes trust and transparency. The resources listed above serve as safe places to tell your stories, and any one of us is available to talk to you privately.
- Our Ethics Committee is in the process of writing a new Code of Ethics as well as a Corrections Policy and a complaint process flowchart. It's not a purely reactionary process. We are including every possible ethics violation we can think of so that these documents are always relevant. We are also using a blind (no names of accused or accusers) chart of current allegations to make sure everything is analyzed without personal bias. We will have this all completed and published on our website by the time the investigation is complete.
- We are actively working on a code of conduct for candidates, as well as something like a Candidates Bill of Rights to further elucidate what one can and should expect

at an examination. Our goal is to make our examinations free of harassment for all candidates, from all sources.

2. **Mentorship:** We have heard from many of our candidates that they are keenly interested in healthy mentor relationships, but that they face industry-wide challenges wherein “mentorship” is offered as a quid-pro-quo, whether that involves a demand for placements in a program or more personal favors. We believe strongly that mentorship should never be transactional, and that pressures of that sort can and should be reported. We are also beginning to explore the idea of new programming that will help candidates build skills and prepare for exams outside of our current courses.
3. **Sommelier Moms:** Balancing work and family in our industry is a completely separate job in itself. With that, there is a lot to discuss surrounding being a mom or single parent working in the wine industry. We are proposing a full listening session dedicated to this topic. Stay tuned!
4. **Non-Gendered Service:**
  - We have a long way to go regarding revised standards for LGBTQIA+ Members, candidates, and constituents. Within the Court of Master Sommeliers, Americas, not all Master Sommeliers are the same. We do not make a single culture. We are a wildly different, weird group of people. We don’t agree on much, except Riesling and Champagne are good.
  - This new Board is a generational shift, and honestly, we are just beginning to talk about how to best represent, accommodate, and set standards that apply to all cultures, identities, and orientations. That is why this conversation is so important.
  - From Mia Van de Water: “There is an appetite for change within our membership, and therefore the potential to truly bring the organization into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We are looking at everything we do, how we do it, and asking how it could be made a better, safer experience for candidates. I realize that I am fairly white-passing, but I am a woman who is not and does not identify as white and I had a tremendously positive, supportive educational experience along my journey. It makes me sad and angry to know that other people have not had the same kind of experience, and I will put all of my energy into working with the rest of the Board of Directors to ensure that kind of safe, supportive experience for every individual.

We also received many questions on the subject of exam transparency, and we clearly see that this is a major area of interest to you all. We are actively exploring ways of bringing transparency to our examination process and will discuss this subject in more depth at the Education & Examination Listening Session on February 4<sup>th</sup>.

We won’t stop listening. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us either by emailing [listening@mastersommeliers.org](mailto:listening@mastersommeliers.org) or visiting the CMS, A [website](#) for panelist contact information.

Yours In Service,

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Chair, Court of Master Sommeliers, Americas

Kathryn Morgan, MS  
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Christopher Bates, MS  
Robert Bigelow, MS  
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