

How I Made Partner: 'Work Hard, Be a Team Player, and Lean Into Your Strengths,' Says Helena Tseregounis of Latham & Watkins

"The most successful attorneys know who they are and how to leverage what they're good at."

By Tasha Norman

Helena Tseregounis, 34, Latham & Watkins, Los Angeles.

Practice Area: Restructuring and Special Situations.

Law school and year of graduation: University of Chicago, 2012.

How long were you an associate at the firm before being promoted to your current title? I was an associate at Latham for 3½ years before I was promoted to partner in 2022.

Were you an associate at another firm before joining your present firm? Yes, I started my career as an associate in the restructuring group at another law firm. I was there for more than five years before I moved to Latham in 2018.

What was the biggest surprise you experienced in becoming partner? So far, I've been overwhelmed by the support and encouragement I've received from others in the partnership. It's only been a few months, so I'm sure I will encounter more surprises along the way!

What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in making you partner? I'd like to think it is my charm. But seriously, I was on a couple of key cases at Latham where the supervising partners went out of their way to mentor me and find opportunities for me to take on leadership roles. Those opportunities, paired with a lot of hard work, allowed me to build trust and meaningful relationships with my clients and gain critical experience in my field. For example, in one of my matters, I built a close relationship with my client and became one of the primary contacts. When we were closing a major transaction in that matter, the more senior attorneys made space for me to run with it: I negotiated all of the deal points, coordinated with the client and managed associates below me so that I was functionally acting as the lead restructuring partner, even though I was still an associate. I found that, if I was able to show my supervisors I was unafraid to take



Courtesy Photo

Helena Tseregounis

on a challenge and jump into the deep end, those opportunities would be there waiting for me. Within the firm I've also always made myself available to support my colleagues in areas where I have expertise, even if it's not a matter I'm actively working on. That has helped me grow my informal relationships and has led to a number of different opportunities.

Describe how you feel about your career now that you've made partner. It's definitely an amazing feeling to reach a professional goal that I've been working towards for years. It feels like the beginning of

a new chapter of my career, which is exciting. There are a lot of things that make this promotion meaningful to me. Perhaps at the outset, my focus was on the feeling of personal achievement and recognition of my accomplishments, but I'm now finding more enjoyment in what it means to be a "partner." I have a sense of pride and personal ownership surrounding the firm's accomplishments, and I'm excited to be partnered with my colleagues in growing our practice.

Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to your leadership role? I'll have to name two: Jeff Bjork, vice-chair of Latham's Restructuring & Special Situations Practice, who I also worked with at my prior firm, is someone I've known since my first days as an associate. He's an exceptional attorney who has mentored me for years, and I've learned so much just from watching him manage complex matters and run negotiations. My second is Gabriel MacConaill who was both a skilled attorney and a fantastic human. He volunteered an immeasurable amount of his time to mentor me through various life obstacles and was one of the first people who made me feel like I was good enough.

What's the best piece of advice you could give an associate who

wants to make partner? Work hard, be a team player and lean into your strengths. I think associates often put a lot of pressure on themselves to fit into a mold of what they think a "partner" should be, but if you're trying to play up a persona that isn't you, it won't feel genuine. The most successful attorneys I've seen know who they are and how to leverage what they're good at.

If you had a chance to mentor your younger self, what advice would you give to yourself? Be confident and trust your abilities. (Sometimes easier said than done, I know!) My practice can be very technical, and the first year or two can be an uphill battle as you learn the terminology and try to grasp various complex financial constructs. I spent too much time in the beginning of my career doubting myself, in part because I was surrounded by brilliant people at my firm and could not wrap my head around how I could ever be as smart or as good as they are. Happily enough, it was many of those same people who ended up being some of my biggest supporters and who, through their belief in me, gave me the conviction to keep pushing forward.

What initiatives are you working on at the firm that you are most proud of? I was previously a co-chair of our Women's Law Group in the Los Angeles office and initiated



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a peer advisory mentoring program that was focused on mentoring and retaining junior talent. Through this program, I was able to build connections with female attorneys who I otherwise may not have had the opportunity to meet within the firm, and provide support and encouragement as they navigated the early years of their career. I was surprised to see how many of us dealt with similar concerns or anxieties even though we were all at different levels of seniority. I am passionate about women's issues and found that program extremely rewarding.

Faced with two equally-qualified candidates for promotion, how do you determine whom to hire? A resume isn't always the best indicator of success in a particular role. For me, attitude is so important. Someone who is happy to work as part of a team and learn—even if the work isn't always the most glamorous—is going to add a lot of value.