

How I Made Partner: 'Your Experience Can Be an Ally,' Says Mark Semotiuk of Latham & Watkins

By ALM Staff

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Mark Semotiuk, 40, Latham & Watkins, New York City

Job title: Partner

Practice area: Real Estate Practice

Law school and year of graduation: J.D., Fordham University, 2014

How long have you been at the firm? Since 2018

What was your criteria in selecting your current firm? I wasn't looking to lateral, but I also recognized that my marketability was high as a mid-level associate, so I took a few interviews to see what was available. What stood out about Latham was its culture. Latham was large but also supportive, transparent, and entrepreneurial. I ultimately lateraled because I could see myself shaping my future at Latham

Were you an associate at another firm before joining your present firm? If so, which one and how long were you there? I was at Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP for about 5 years (including my summer)

What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in making you partner? Was it your performance on a specific case? A personality trait? Making connections with the right people? Latham's path to partnership process was fairly rigorous and transparent, and it was more of a process as opposed to a single deciding point. I focused on meeting the partnership's criteria, which meant developing my substantive knowledge, transaction leadership, internal relationships, client

stickiness and community contribution (e.g. mentorship and pro bono work), and working lots of billable hours!

Who had or has the greatest influence in your career and why? Please provide name, job title and a brief

explanation. The Global Co-Chairs of Latham's Real Estate Practice, Michael Haas and Michelle Kelban. I believe it is critical for any associate to have a good mentor if they would like to tough it out in big law. In my case, Michael and Michelle made sure that I was busy with substantive work, helped me navigate internal and external relationships, and also helped me set realistic goals and expectations.

What advice would you give an associate who wants to make partner? Three things: think long term, find a good mentor, and have grit. Think long term because making partner is the beginning of the next (and possibly longest) stage of your career. Find a good mentor because they will guide you and help you avoid pitfalls. Have grit because the track is long, the job is demanding, and showing up day after day is half the battle.

When it comes to career planning and navigating inside a law firm, in your opinion, what's the most common mistake you see other attorneys



Mark Semotiuk,
Latham & Watkins.

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making? The work-from-home movement has changed the world, but if you want to get ahead there is no substitute for face time. You don't have to be in the office five days a week, but you do have to make your time in the office matter. Make sure you are always available for your key stakeholders (mentors, mentees, clients). Figure out the right balance for you, but the nature of a career in the service industry is to be available when needed.

What challenges, if any, did you face or had to overcome in your career path and what was the lesson learned? How did it affect or influence your career? I am a second-career lawyer. My career started in real estate finance in late 2007. During the financial crisis, one of our institutional equity partners told us to go on vacation for 18 months until the crisis abated. Thankfully, we continued to grind and acquired some properties that ended up being home runs. The patience and persistence that I learned over those years was crucial in my development as an attorney. The memory of the crisis is a constant reminder of how fortunate we are to have such great careers.

Knowing what you know now about your career path, what advice would you give to your younger self? As a senior associate, you may vacillate between imposter syndrome and the Dunning-Kruger effect. At times you will know more than you think, while at other times the best course of action will be to exercise some humility. In the end, your experience can be an ally that allows you to trust your gut and judgement.

Do you utilize technology to benefit the firm/practice and/or business development? Although I use the typical suite of legal software now, I believe the next 10-20 years will result in true technological disruption in the legal industry. In particular, I believe that AI will greatly simplify contract review



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and drafting. The lawyer's role will be to curate information and contracts, as opposed to using blunt force to get through diligence and documents.

How would you describe your work mindset? Being a big law lawyer is like being a professional athlete. You spend years developing a skill set and, if you're lucky enough, you get drafted to a great team. The competitive nature of the game means you're constantly working hard and striving to improve and grow. I've also found that development off the court also results in improvement on the court—it's a lifestyle. Finally, you should always try to remember the love for the game that drew you into the career in the first instance.

If you participate in firm or industry initiatives, please mention the initiatives you are working on as well as the impact you hope to achieve. Beyond the substantive practice of law, I also focus on pro bono, business development, knowledge management, recruiting, and mentoring. Whether it's lunch with an associate or a client, a call with an entrepreneur or law student, or just helping people locate the right form, I always try to find a bit of extra time in my day to help out.