

How I Made Partner: 'Be Vocal and Express Your Interest in Making Partner Early,' Says Patricia Brum of Snell & Wilmer

Talk to your mentors and office leadership about your desire to make partner. Listen and implement their suggestions.

By Tasha Norman

Patricia Brum, 44, Snell & Wilmer, Los Angeles

Practice area: Commercial litigation.

Law school and year of graduation: Southwestern Law School (J.D., summa cum laude, 2014).

How long have you been at the firm? Three and a half years. I was voted into the partnership in December 2021, effective on March 1, 2022.

How long were you an associate at the firm? Three years.

Were you an associate at another firm before joining your present firm? Prior to joining Snell & Wilmer, I was an associate at a boutique commercial litigation firm in Los Angeles, California, for four years.

What criteria did you use when deciding to join your current firm? I had three essential requirements.

First, the firm had to have a culture that fostered collegiality. As lawyers, we spend so much of our time at work, and I wanted to be part of a team that was friendly, encouraging and committed to helping one another.

Second, the firm had to support my business development efforts. It is rare for large law firms to encourage associates to build their own book of business because that business is initially small. I wanted to join a firm that valued and encouraged those small matters because they provided me with the opportunity to develop my skills as a lawyer.

Third, and finally, partnership had to be attainable and the path to it clearly defined.

What's the biggest surprise you experienced in becoming a partner? I was very surprised to learn how much time partners, at least



Patricia Brum
Courtesy Photo

at our firm, spend discussing and implementing initiatives to mentor, promote, and develop associates. Law firms have a reputation for being such harsh work environments, but I don't think that is accurate. Yes, our work as lawyers is demanding and intense, but there is also a concerted effort from partners to ensure that junior lawyers

achieve their goals. This was a very nice surprise.

What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in making you a partner? Snell & Wilmer has a credo that guides our decisions as a group and as individuals. We are constantly asked three questions: What are we doing for our clients? What are we doing for our firm? What are we doing for our community? The deciding point for the firm to make me partner was my commitment to each of these three areas.

What's the key to successful business development in your opinion and how do you grow professionally while everyone is navigating a hybrid work system? The key to successful business development is to be genuine and authentic in our interactions and relationships with others. I know it sounds cliché, but if you want to develop business, just be yourself: participate in activities, join groups, advocate for causes that you identify with.

Of course, that is not always easy. As a lesbian, Latina, and immigrant (with a charming Brazilian accent), I spent countless hours in the early stages of my career concerned about how much of myself I should share with my business contacts. I soon realized that this was a futile exercise because being authentic was the

only way that I could develop deep, meaningful, and prosperous business relationships.

COVID and the new hybrid work system (remote/in-person) does not change that. Yes, the medium for my interactions has changed, but the nature of those interactions has not. Instead of meeting up for happy hour, lunch or coffee, I sometimes pick up the phone or join a Zoom call. What remains the same is my genuine interest in learning about how my contacts are doing. It is not the in-person meeting that sets you apart; rather it is your genuine interest in developing that relationship.

Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to partner? Making partner at a large firm with dozens of different offices is challenging because you need an advocate that is well connected and respected across those offices. I was lucky enough to have not one, but four partners that advocated and promoted me firmwide.

Cary Jones, a real estate lawyer and managing partner of the Los Angeles office. Since my first day at Snell, Cary has taken the time to reach out to others at the firm to introduce me. He constantly shares my personal and professional achievements with the firm's leadership.

Jason Yu, a commercial litigation and labor and employment partner,

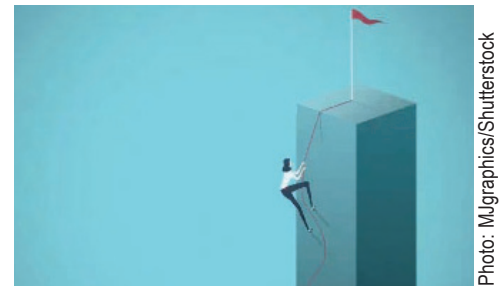


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Los Angeles office. Jason has given me two incredible gifts. First, he has kept me busy. Jason consistently assigns me to his cases and ensures that I am gaining the skills necessary to become an even better lawyer. Second, Jason has helped develop my business development skills. Jason is my sounding board with respect to business development strategies.

Keith Gregory, a commercial litigation practice leader, Los Angeles. Keith is my mentor and confidant. Shortly after joining Snell, I told Keith that I wanted to make partner at Snell, and for years he guided me to ensure that I achieved that goal.

Josh Schneiderman, a corporate and securities partner. Josh has given me the opportunity to work with partners that I would not otherwise work with. Because of him, I have had the opportunity to work closely with several partners from across our offices.

What advice would you give an associate who wants to make partner? Be vocal. Express your interest

in making partner early and ask for advice on how to accomplish that goal. Talk to your mentors and office leadership about your desire to make partner. Listen and implement their suggestions.

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 making? Focusing solely on billable hours and ignoring the value of building relationships within the firm. Associates often overlook nonbillable opportunities within the firm, such as joining and participating in a firm's affinity committee, co-authoring articles with partners, volunteering to assist with research assignments for clients' pitches. These "extra-curricular" activities allow associates to build close, meaningful relationships with the leaders and partners that will advocate for them.

What challenges did you overcome in your career path and what was the lesson learned? Early in my career, I was very insecure about my identity and background. I looked at attorneys who were in the positions that I wished to occupy, and none of them looked and sounded like me, or had backgrounds like

mine. I grew up in Brazil. English is not my first language (which others can easily pick up on because of my accent). I am a lesbian. I did not attend a fancy law school in the U.S. Being the poster child for diversity is not easy, especially in the legal profession. I was constantly asking myself: Am I good enough? Can I make it as a lawyer?

It took several years, and a lot of encouragement from my mentors, to fully understand that I am good enough, and that the attributes that I was worried and self-conscious about were positive traits because they allow me to provide a unique perspective, enhance the discussion, and be creative with legal arguments.

But I am not naïve. I know and have felt firsthand that not everyone in the legal profession values those differences. I am lucky enough to be at a firm, working alongside clients and colleagues that do. What else can I ask for? I feel seen, respected, and valued and that is the best encouragement that I can have.

Knowing what you know now about your career path, what advice would you give to your younger self? Believe in yourself. You may not look, sound, or have a similar background to others in the

legal profession, but there is value and strength in those differences.

What impact would you like to have on the legal industry as a whole? Increase the number of women and diverse lawyers in Big Law. The legal profession is for everyone. Our clients and the legal profession as a whole benefit immensely from having lawyers with different identities and backgrounds.

What lessons, if any, did you learn in 2020/2021 (the COVID years)? The COVID years taught me that I don't need to be physically present to develop a close relationship with someone. Even as we return to our offices and in-person meetings, I continue to have Zoom calls with people that are in other cities and countries. There is one group in which we have people joining from Brazil, U.S.A. and the U.K. I love those Zoom calls. It is early morning for some of us, late evening for others. Yet, we all make time to connect.

What three key elements you would like to focus on for 2022.

- Family (my wife and I are expecting our first child and I can't wait for this next chapter).
- Be unapologetically yourself.
- Mentor others the way you wish someone had mentored you.