

How I Made Partner: Ropes & Gray's Regina Sam Pentti

Start by earning a reputation for doing great work and then go knock on doors. Law is ultimately a relationship business.

By Tasha Norman

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Practice area: Intellectual Property and Data Transactions.

Law school and year of graduation: Harvard Law School, 2010.

How long have you been at the firm? Fourteen years. I joined Ropes & Gray in 2006, as a technical advisor in the firm's IP practice in New York. A close friend joined the firm a few months prior and raved about the technical advisor program. I was an engineer in search of a new challenge, and once I got to spend time with my friend's co-workers, I was totally sold. I applied to the program and have been with the firm ever since.

How long were you an associate before becoming partner? In all, for eight years. In 2007, I started law school full time while still working as a technical advisor at Ropes & Gray. When I graduated in 2010, I became an associate and remained an associate for seven years. Then, I was counsel for one year before making partner.

Were you an associate at another firm before joining your present



Courtesy photo

Regina Sam Pentti.

firm? No, I began my legal career at Ropes & Gray.

What year did you make partner at your current firm? In 2018.

What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in making you partner? I don't know if it was just one factor, but being able to jump with both feet into challenges probably helped. Early on in my career, I was thrown into the "lion's den", as the staffing partner put it, and asked to manage a client with very high expectations. Though the experience was challenging, I quickly learned



how to build client relationships by understanding their goals, anticipating their constraints and adapting to the way that they work.

I also agreed to go on a client secondment that sent me 2000 miles away from home for a year, but provided a front-row seat to the internal workings of a high-stakes project in a complex, highly regulated industry. When my team needed more hands in Europe, I became qualified as a solicitor and developed trans-Atlantic legal expertise and practice. These and similar experiences ultimately taught me the critical role that building trust and long-lasting relationships with clients play in an associate's development and advancement.

I also remember that, in one of my early performance reviews, I was

told that I “demanded a seat at the table and used my voice when I got there.” Though I didn’t know at the time whether this was a compliment or a criticism, I came to embrace this as a core part of my personality. Over time, I continued to raise my hand and step into leadership roles at the firm. I became co-chair of the firm’s diversity committee earlier this year.

What was the biggest surprise since making partner? I was surprised by the incredibly talented associates of color I spoke with shortly after I made partner who deeply questioned what value they brought to the table. When I was an associate, I was lucky to have mentors who underscored the value I brought to our client teams and who spoke candidly about life as a partner. That helped me tremendously in my own assessment of whether partnership was attainable and worth pursuing. Many diverse associates don’t have that. It can be daunting to build those relationships that provide access to such critical information when practically no one above you looks like you. Without direct, unfiltered insights to combat the myths and the dominant narratives about the who, the how, and the why of law firm partnerships, we will continue to see many promising diverse associates leave law firms before they are even up for consideration, which only perpetuates the cycle. I think we need to bridge that information gap.

What is the best piece of advice for associates aspiring to become

partner? Be flexible. Think critically about what success looks like for you, and what trade-offs and compromises it will take to get you there. It’s great to aspire to partnership, and I think it’s a fantastic career path that can offer a lot of satisfaction and flexibility, but there are many other paths to a satisfying legal career, and even the path to partnership can include fulfilling detours. Narrowly focusing on partnership as the ultimate goal can lead to tunnel vision, missed opportunities to grow into your best self, and unnecessary angst if that does not come to fruition.

The best piece of advice as a junior associate was to start by earning a reputation for doing great work and then go knock on doors. Law is ultimately a relationship business. Whether your goal is partnership or not, being able to interact, connect, engage and communicate clearly with people about the law and outside interests is critical to your success as a trusted advisor. Reach beyond the four corners of your practice, and participate in mentoring, training and social activities both within and outside the firm.

Who had the greatest influence on your career leading you to partner? Since my early years at Ropes & Gray, IP transactions partner Ed Kelly has been a mentor to me, not only on intellectual property law, but also from a career strategy standpoint. Ed gave me invaluable advice about aligning my practice with the strategic direction of

the firm, and stressed the importance of taking a holistic view of a practice, rather than working on an assignment-to-assignment basis.

Ed is also a role model for having a balanced career as a partner. His ability to work very hard but also take time out to live a full life is encouraging and inspiring.

How does your firm invest in the growth and talent of women lawyers?

The three years leading up to my making partner were very turbulent. I gave birth to twins, returned from maternity leave amid a strategic shift in my practice area, and had a burgeoning cross-Atlantic practice that had me volleying between the United States and Europe. It was an overwhelming time, one that I survived thanks to the amazing support and encouragement that I received from the firm, including partners taking on travel obligations to reduce the amount of time I spent away from home.



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