

They've Got Next: The 40 Under 40 – Alex Kelly of Latham & Watkins

By Lisa Helem

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Alex Kelly

Age: 39

Law Firm: Latham & Watkins

Practice Area: M&A

Title: Partner

Location: New York, NY

Law School: New York University School of Law



Please describe two of your most substantial, recent wins in practice.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Latham advised DXC Technology (NYSE: DXC) on the \$5 billion sale of its U.S. State and Local Health and Human Services business to Veritas Capital, and the \$525 million sale of its healthcare software provider business to the Dedalus Group. Both deals were complex cross-border asset carve-out transactions that required significant effort to separate the businesses being sold. I am proud of the skill and adaptability demonstrated by Latham's global, multidisciplinary deal team as we partnered with DXC to advise, negotiate and execute on these transactions amidst the pandemic. Our teams worked hand-in-hand to navigate a myriad of challenges and formulate creative solutions, which resulted in the successful completion of these transactions despite the unprecedented circumstances.

What is the most important lesson you learned as a first-year attorney and how does it inform your practice today?

I learned that the legal field is not dissimilar to my college jobs in the restaurant industry – at base it's a client service business where success is dependent on being prepared, having acute attention to detail, and understanding and prioritizing the clients' objectives.

A high percentage of client complaints center around client service and deal management type items that require no specialized knowledge such as incorrect signature pages, missed comments in documents, or lack of organization. As a junior associate, I quickly realized that while I didn't have a ton to contribute in terms of market experience and legal knowledge, I could still add real value by making sure the deal process ran smoothly and that all documents were accurate.

These lessons continue to inform my work as a more senior practitioner. I try to look at a deal from my clients' perspective and ask myself what the Latham team can be doing to more seamlessly and efficiently advance their objectives. And while I always provide my candid views on a particular topic, I make sure to tailor my advice to the client's objectives, as opposed to, for instance, what I may think, in isolation, is "market" or the "right" answer.

How do you define success in your practice?

I feel most successful when I am able to partner with my clients to help them achieve their objectives. In particular, I want the client to feel that our team has brought to the table all of the tools, legal knowledge, and market acumen necessary get the deal done. Oftentimes, this boils down to carefully understanding the issues and objectives of both sides and suggesting creative, commercial solutions that can help bridge gaps and get a deal across the finish line. Simply put, I want my clients and the parties across the table to think of me as the lawyer who finds solutions, and not as someone who creates issues and roadblocks.

What are you most proud of as a lawyer?

I'm proud that I have been able to forge a path for myself in a field that is not well-trodden for women – and particularly women with children – which has required perseverance through some challenging circumstances.

Like others in my position, amassing the knowledge and deal experience to move up the associate ranks to make partner, and then to progress within the partnership ranks, came with a lot of hard work and sacrifice. Along the way, I also juggled the challenges of balancing my professional ambitions with multiple pregnancies, my desire to be an active and present parent and certain other care-taking responsibilities for elderly family members. To see that sacrifice and hard work materialize into a partnership promotion, and then to continued success within the partnership, has been extremely rewarding for me. This is true not only because of the professional milestones, but because it serves as a statement (one which I hope will resonate with more junior female attorneys) that having a family and a legal career are not mutually exclusive.

Who is your greatest mentor in the law and what have they taught you?

It has truly taken a village for me to reach this point in my career. I've been fortunate to have benefited from the mentorship and support of many Latham attorneys who taught me, made me feel part of the team, and helped me navigate my path.

The biggest lesson I've learned from these mentors is where you choose to practice – and the colleagues you surround yourself with – are critically important. From a business perspective, delivering top-quality client service requires a team that is rowing in the same direction and committed to the same standards of excellence. On a personal level, developing the skills, knowledge, and client relationships necessary to progress is largely a function of others taking time to teach you, create opportunities, and help you navigate the system. My colleagues made both of these outcomes possible for me. Now, I try to pay it forward by mentoring junior lawyers.

Just for fun, tell us your two favorite songs on your summer music playlist.

While not necessarily my favorites, my kids have ensured that the theme songs from the TV shows “Shimmer and Shine” and “Blaze and the Monster Machines” are the two most-played songs on my playlist.

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