

How I Made Partner: Latham & Watkins' Laura Washington

"You have to add value to a litigation or a deal in a unique way—whether by knowing an area of the law or the facts of a case better than anyone else, or having great rapport with clients."

By Tasha Norman

Laura Washington, 34, Latham & Watkins

Office: Century City, California.

Practice area: Complex commercial litigation and entertainment sports and media litigation.

Law school and year of graduation: Georgetown University Law Center, 2009.

How long have you been at the firm? Since June 2015.

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

Were you an associate at another firm before joining your present firm? Yes, I started my career as an associate at O'Melveny & Myers in December 2009. I left in June 2015 and came to Latham & Watkins.

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

What's the biggest surprise you experienced in becoming partner? When I made partner, I received so

many congratulations and heartfelt notes from staff, associates and my fellow partners throughout the firm. What struck me the most was the number of notes I received from female associates of color, some of whom I had never met, expressing how I had inspired them by making partner. When I was grinding to make partner, I could get so absorbed in the details of a specific matter or litigation that I could lose the perspective that associates look to their seniors—particularly partners—as a guide or model for their own careers. To realize I had become a model for others was truly humbling and surprising and incredibly meaningful.

What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in making you partner? Latham takes a holistic approach when selecting partners and considers many factors. I believe Latham considered my performance on individual matters, my ability to work with other partners and to supervise junior associates, my work on



Laura Washington of Latham & Watkins.

firm committees, my commitment to the firm's diversity efforts, and the strength of my practice and potential for growth.

Describe how you feel now about your career now that you've made partner. Pretty good. Making partner was a goal I was striving for since I was a junior associate, and when it happened it was an amazing feeling. But I see partnership as one step in a long career, one that allows me to have more control in shaping my career.

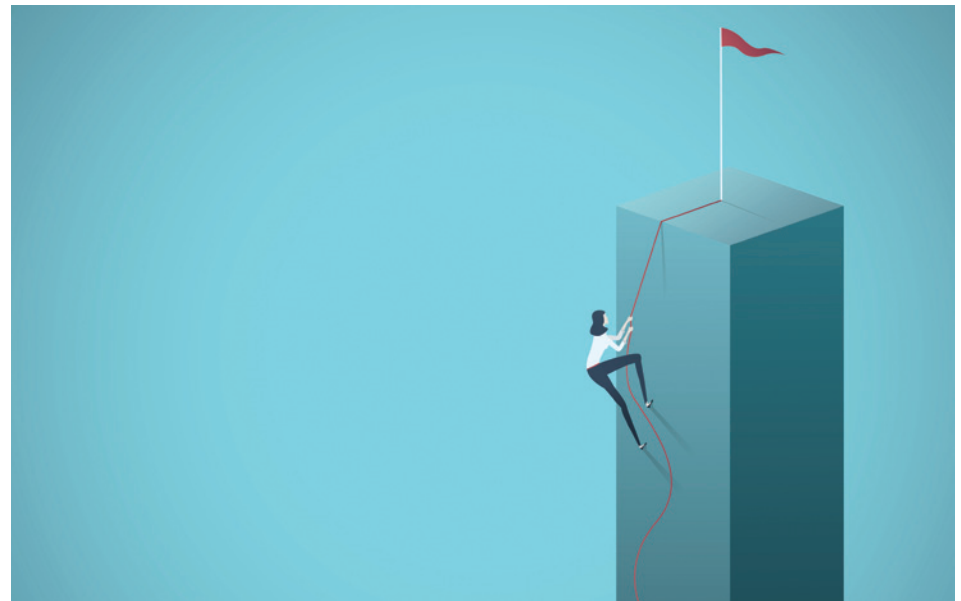
What's the key to successful business development in your opinion?

Saying yes. We work long, hard hours. So when clients, potential clients, friends, work colleagues or acquaintances ask us to attend events at the end of a long day, it can be tempting to make excuses and say no. But saying yes and attending events is the key to successful business development—which is all about relationships. By going, not only are you maintaining and improving your relationships with current clients and colleagues, but you are generating opportunities to form relationships with individuals that may ultimately lead to new business.

What's been the biggest change, day-to-day, in your routine since becoming partner?

The amount of emails and calls I get in a single day has significantly increased, especially after 9 a.m. In order to manage, I get into the office much earlier, well before 9 a.m. I find that I can be the most productive early in the day when it is quieter.

Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to partner? Marvin Putnam, a trial and litigation partner in the entertainment, sports and media practice. Marvin was



previously a partner at O'Melveny & Myers when I started my career there. From my first year as an associate until now, Marvin has always supported my career and been my mentor and sponsor. When I was a junior associate, he had confidence in me and gave me opportunities that junior associates typically do not receive, like first chairing depositions, preparing CEOs for trial testimony, and participating in jury voir dire. His confidence has never wavered and continues now that I am his partner. The opportunities Marvin presented me as a junior associate were instrumental to my development into the lawyer I am today.

What's the best piece of advice you could give an associate who wants to make partner? Obviously,

doing excellent work is a prerequisite for making partner. But all of the associates who are considered for partner do excellent work, so partnership requires more than that. You have to add value to a litigation or a deal in a unique way—whether by knowing an area of the law or the facts of a case better than anyone else or having a great rapport with clients. Your value proposition could be anything. Once you identify how you can add value in a unique way, use that skill to distinguish yourself from other associates. And make sure you have a mentor. Without a mentor—someone guiding your path to partnership, that path is nearly impossible to navigate. We all stand on someone else's shoulders. Make sure you have shoulders to stand on.