

How I Made Partner: 'Develop a Practice That Is True to Who You Are,' Says Julie Simeone of Patterson Belknap

By ALM Staff

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Julie Simeone, Partner at Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler, New York, New York

Practice area: Litigation

Law school and year of graduation: New York University School of Law, 2014

The following has been edited for style.

How long have you been at the firm?

Since October 2017.

What was your criteria in selecting your current firm?

I knew I wanted to be a trial lawyer, and Patterson is a firm for trial lawyers. I was also drawn to Patterson's strong commitment to pro bono work. This proved true in spades. Just last year I headed a team of Patterson attorneys that took on a case through the Southern District of New York pro bono program. We represented an individual bringing federal civil rights claims against the city related to his conditions of confinement and who had been proceeding without representation up until trial. We put a lot into the case—engaging experts, reopening aspects of discovery—and ultimately received a favorable settlement for the client. The unwavering support from the firm only underscored that pro bono work is not just a talking point, but an expectation.

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?

I'm confident it was not one specific case. Rather, flexibility in taking on projects across a range of practice groups has been a crucial factor in my trajectory at the firm. In the last six months alone, I have

worked on multiple law firm defense matters, a trade dress litigation, a qui tam action involving the False Claims Act, cases involving product labeling for a beverage company, and an art law licensing dispute and arbitration, among others. These matters span from the west to the east coast.

People want to work with individuals who raise their hand and are willing to venture beyond their comfort zone. That's true for associates, counsel, partners, and in most areas of life.

Who had or has the greatest influence in your career and why?

You really can't do this alone. When I was a very junior associate at another law firm, I had the great fortune of working with a partner (and mentor) who placed a lot of trust in me. We tried a memorable trade secret case together where the substance of my role far exceeded my seniority. I learned early on that my "class year" did not have to dictate my opportunities if I was willing to put in the work.



Julie Simeone of Patterson Belknap

Courtesy photo

At Patterson, I am grateful to have a team of supporters. I currently practice closely with Fred Warder and Alejandro Cruz, both of Patterson's law firm defense group. They are two of the best lawyers I know and extraordinary managers of people. They have also been the highest caliber sponsors of my career, encouraging me to take critical steps in building a practice. Over my years at Patterson, Josh Goldberg and Jane Metcalf have also been models of impeccable advocacy. It is a privilege to have grown up at this firm and now be able to call these remarkable people my partners.

Last, but absolutely not least, my husband has been my biggest champion throughout everything. I'm amazed by the level of support he shows up with every day.

What advice would you give an associate who wants to make partner?

There are many paths to a long career in the law. In my case, I came to Big Law after pursuing theatre and receiving my master's degree in human rights. That may be a non-traditional course, but I credit these experiences with shaping my career—both in terms of how I litigate and the types of matters that interest me. To sustain your motivation, it is important to develop a practice that is true to who you are and that resonates with your interests. There are different ways to build a career; but it's ultimately up to you to figure out what you find satisfying.

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?

Sometimes junior lawyers do not fully appreciate the degree of control they have over their careers from an early stage. (I did not.) There are almost always opportunities to steer yourself toward cases that intrigue you. Not every matter will be a

great fit, and that's fine. Discovering a poor fit is often a prerequisite to finding a good one. Instead of waiting for the next assignment, reach out and express interest in helping with something. People will usually be delighted to hear from you!

Knowing what you know now about your career path, what advice would you give to your younger self?

Get involved in bar organizations and other professional groups relevant to the area or areas of law that you like early in your career. Given the heavy demands of practice, we naturally focus on day-to-day client work—that's what I did as a junior lawyer. In retrospect, I regret not carving out more time at an earlier stage to build a professional network adjacent to the connections I made organically through client matters.

How do you utilize technology to benefit the firm/practice and/or business development?

I serve on the firm's innovation committee, which assesses everything from discovery tools to potential uses of Artificial Intelligence technology. I also look for opportunities to collaborate with my network on related thought leadership. Last year, for example, I coordinated and moderated a panel with firm colleagues and a representative from a prominent economic consulting firm on developments in artificial intelligence, its related legal implications, and the business challenges it creates for the workplace.

How would you describe your work mindset?

I'm a planner. I am organized and do all I can to avoid fire drills—not only because I dislike them but because I know the toll they take on people. Long hours are often inevitable, but planning can substantially improve the team environment. My hope is that people on my teams always know their responsibilities and that they realize that when long days are necessary, I'll be working alongside them.