

## My First Year at Selendy & Gay

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*In the year since [Jessica Underwood](#) joined Selendy & Gay, the Texas transplant has taken depositions, conducted a direct examination of an expert witness at trial, and spearheaded several appellate briefs—all experiences she expected would take years to encounter at a New York firm.*

*Recently, she talked to us about the paradox of coming to New York City to get hands-on trial experience as an associate, the growth that comes from responsibility, and having fun while practicing law at the highest level.*

### **How did you first learn about Selendy & Gay?**

I was practicing at a firm in Dallas after clerking for two years—first at the Northern District of Texas and then on the Fifth Circuit—and I wasn't considering a move. My work was interesting and I had great colleagues and mentors. I was dating somebody long-distance in New York, but the plan was for my boyfriend (now fiancé) to return to Texas. Then one day, he received an email about Selendy & Gay from a recruiter and, in a last-ditch attempt to interest me in moving to New York, passed it along. I agreed to look into it, but I was skeptical that the opportunity would justify leaving behind the career and professional network I was building in Texas.

After connecting with the recruiter, I was intrigued and agreed to fly up to New York to meet with the firm, although I still had reservations about leaving my firm in Texas. But a 45-minute interview with [Lena Konanova](#) completely shifted my perspective. After hearing her talk about the partners' [founding mission](#) and observing her energy and excitement, I realized that not only was I interested in Selendy & Gay, I was prepared to leave a job I loved to be part of it.

## What tipped the scales and made you want to join Selendy & Gay?

Many prestigious law firms, particularly in New York, have a reputation for grinding associates through their first 10 years of practice before entrusting them with real, substantive work. I incorrectly thought that working at a New York firm necessarily meant I would get less meaningful experience, and I wasn't interested in that trade-off.

But Lena and the other partners had a unique vision—one I had not encountered anywhere else. Their approach to associate development and their ethos meant that I would be given significant responsibility, near-immediate trial experience, and the chance to work on cases with a broader impact.

True to their word, on my first day I was assigned to a case set for trial a mere month and a half later, and, within three months of joining the firm, I conducted my first witness examination and delivered part of a closing argument.

The partners here recognize that a [commitment to associate development](#) early on is not only an investment in the future talent of the firm, but also results in unparalleled client service. Here, every single team member is expected to take ownership of a case and even the most junior associates are given opportunities to shine. It's a forward-thinking model that takes serious effort but is ultimately more rewarding for our associates, the firm, and our clients.

## What do you like best about being here?

What I loved most about being a law clerk was working in a small group with some of the brightest young lawyers in the country to tackle complex legal problems. I have found that same level of discourse and collaboration in my day-to-day work at Selendy & Gay. Associates and partners routinely stop by my office just to talk through thorny legal issues, even when I'm not staffed on that particular case.

This makes showing up to work fun. We're a group of people who truly love the practice of law and are engaged and committed to excellent work. It's inspiring and energizing to be in a place where everyone shares that goal and passion.

## How would you describe the environment?

As a firm, we are informal and embrace individuality. My colleagues are some of the smartest people I know, while also being down-to-earth and approachable—a rare combination.

Refreshingly, there's not a strict hierarchy at the firm. You won't find first-year associates reporting to third-year associates reporting to senior associates reporting to partners. It's a collegial environment where every member of the team is empowered. I've never been in a client meeting with a partner where I haven't felt encouraged to voice my point of view. I bring my best to every meeting and phone call because somebody is going to care about what I have to say.

## What are the risks of joining a new firm?

I didn't feel that I was taking a big risk when I decided to join Selendy & Gay. Some of the most accomplished lawyers in the country have chosen to be here, and getting to learn from attorneys of this caliber seemed like a very low-risk proposition.

To me, the key consideration when choosing a firm is what you will learn and be permitted to take on. In just one year here, I've gotten substantive practice experience that I would not have elsewhere and am taking on new challenges that will shape me into a first class trial lawyer.