

Oscar Shine Featured in Law.com's "How I Made Partner"

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Practice area: Litigation.

Law school and year of graduation: Duke University School of Law, Class of 2013.

How long have you been at the firm? I joined Selendy & Gay just after the firm opened, in March 2018. I was one of the first associates to be hired. I interviewed in partners' living rooms because the firm didn't have an office at that point. After I joined, the office was an active construction zone, with plastic sheeting on the walls and wires hanging out of the ceiling, so I could—quite literally—see the place being built around me while I worked. It's rare to get that startup feeling in the legal industry, and I remember that time fondly, even though a lot of my conference calls were interrupted by the sound of power tools.

What year did you make partner at your current firm? January 2021.

As part of the firm's first class from associate to partner what do you think was the deciding point for the firm in making you partner? I'm sure it was *not* any particular case or assignment. Joining a partnership is like joining a family—people need to be comfortable with the idea that you will occupy a position of trust in their lives for a long time. I don't believe decisions like that get made based on specific engagements, but rather based on the impression people form over many years of working together. My strategy, as an associate, was to think of the partners in my firm as clients, and my job was to make them successful at their jobs.

Describe how you feel about your career now that you've made partner. I'm having fun. As a partner, I have greater exposure to the business side of the firm, which calls for a different set of skills. As an associate, I did not fully appreciate how the legal work of the firm was made possible by our very skilled

professional staff. It's fascinating to see how all the pieces come together to make a functioning organization, and I have enjoyed learning about, for example, our finance, marketing, and recruiting teams. Law is an amazing profession, in the sense that it never really gets easier—just as you start to get good at one thing, it unlocks another level of challenges. You really can't be bored.

Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to partner? After law school, I was very fortunate to clerk for the Hon. Gerald B. Tjoflat of the United States Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit. Judge Tjoflat is an accomplished jurist, but his clerks know he is also incredibly generous with his time in mentoring young lawyers. He emphasized that, once you are out of school, you have to define success for yourself—there's no more grading curve, you are on your own. I will always be grateful to him for his advice, encouragement, and example.

What advice you could give an associate who wants to make partner? More than anything, making partner requires a shift in mindset from being task-oriented to being outcome-oriented. As a junior lawyer, I was very focused on completing the task in front of me—drafting the letter to opposing counsel, for example, or finding the right authority to cite in a brief, or combing through a document production to find killer evidence for our client. But partners are responsible for the outcome of an engagement, which requires a different, wider perspective.

It is not enough to ensure that your own work is impeccable—though obviously that's essential. You also have to make sure the case as a whole is being driven toward the best possible outcome for your client. That is the world partners live in, because they have ultimate accountability to clients, so if you want to make partner you need to live in that world, too.

What challenges did you face in your career path, and what was the lesson learned? The legal profession can be very tough on parents. I am embarrassed to say I didn't really appreciate this until I had children of my own, right around the time I decided to aim for partnership in earnest. I have a vivid memory of being up all night with a sick child just before an oral argument and wondering, "How does anybody pull this off?" And one reason I could pull it off was that the partners I worked for were forward-thinking and supportive.

I've spoken to a lot of lawyer-parents—especially women, but dads too—who say they feel like they need to hide their families from their colleagues for fear of being perceived as less dedicated. One small thing I try to do is be very candid about my family commitments. If I can't make a call because of childcare commitments, I say so. I'm hopeful that things are beginning to get better for parents in the legal profession—maybe not as fast as we would like—but getting better all the same.

Knowing what you know now about your career path, what advice would you give to your younger self. For a long time, I assumed partners had all the answers. I was hard on myself when I encountered something I didn't already know or understand. It took me a long time—too long—to realize that the senior lawyers did not necessarily have the answers. Instead, what set them apart was, first, their ability to operate with incomplete information, and second, their ability to identify what they needed to know and then go figure those things out efficiently. Very few people are born with those abilities. I see now those skills can be learned, and I wish I had been more patient with myself.

What lessons did you learn in 2020/2021 (the years of COVID-19)? I was impressed by how quickly litigators adapted to a remote-work world. Law as a profession gets a lot of (often deserved) flak for being slow to evolve, and yet throughout 2020 we had teams arguing motions, taking depositions and even running entire trials on Zoom. All that would have been unthinkable before the pandemic, but when circumstances demanded a different way of litigating, people found a way. I do think smaller firms like ours have an advantage here, being more nimble and less weighed down by convention.

Attorney

- Oscar Shine