

## How I Made Partner: 'As a Partner, It's Critical to Be Able to Empower Associates to Take a Lead Role on Transactions,' Says Scott Herrig of Davis Polk & Wardwell

**"It's important for associates to find a true partner mentor and to have an open dialogue with her or him about career goals, including the desire to be promoted."**

By Tasha Norman

**Scott Herrig, 36, Davis Polk & Wardwell, New York.**

**Practice area:** Finance.

**Law school and year of graduation:** Berkeley Law, 2012.

**How long have you been at the firm?** I joined Davis Polk full time after graduating from law school in 2012. I also spent my 2L summer at Davis Polk as a summer associate.

**How long were you an associate at the firm?** From fall 2012 until June 2020.

**What year did you make partner at your current firm?** Summer 2020.

**What criteria did you use when deciding to join your current firm?** In law school, I wasn't certain whether I wanted to focus on transactional work or litigation, but I was leaning toward the former. I ultimately decided to join Davis Polk's New York office because of the breadth of, and excellence across, its practice groups, coupled with the opportunity to "rotate" through two corporate practice groups upon joining the firm. I ultimately chose to join our finance practice group after completing six-month rotations through it and our financial institutions group.

**What's the biggest surprise you experienced in becoming partner?**

Shortly after being promoted, I became a staffing partner for our group, which is a role I held for a year. This role is multifaceted, but at its core entails finding projects for associates that are appropriate for their skill sets and reporting to other partners our capacity to take on additional projects. Of course, during this time our group was working on a record number of deals—starting with liquidity financings caused by the pandemic but quickly shifting to acquisition-related and other financings—while grappling with significant personal challenges resulting from the pandemic. Against this backdrop, the staffing partner role was immensely challenging, but I found it incredibly rewarding to work closely with our associates. One aspect of this role that was a bit surprising was the degree to which the other finance partners truly valued my input on project intake and staffing matters, even though I had been promoted just a few months before. Receiving that level of trust from colleagues who I recently viewed as my bosses was a very satisfying way to start my career as a partner.

**What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in making you partner?** Working as a finance



Scott Herrig

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lawyer entails both analyzing technical issues and negotiating those issues in a collaborative manner with clients and counterparties. As an associate, you are required to execute those core responsibilities of analysis and negotiation over and over again on various internal teams consisting of partners and other associate team members. I would like to think that my promotion resulted from demonstrating, day in and day out, that I was capable not only of discharging those responsibilities myself but, as important, that I was able and willing

to empower junior associates to do so. As a partner, it's critical to be able to empower associates to take a lead role on transactions.

**What's the key to successful business development in your opinion, and how do you grow professionally while everyone is navigating a hybrid work system?** Providing excellent client service on each transaction is key to business development. Clients should leave the deal wanting to work with you again. Of course, that's not enough. Staying in close touch with clients and, in many cases, counterparties following the deal is also needed. Some forms of business development can certainly be done remotely; for example, sharing market insights over email or conducting remote presentations. But, circumstances permitting, there is no substitute for meeting clients in person, whether for a meal or for a more formal event.

**Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to partner?** It's not possible to name a single person, so I'll name a few key individuals. Jim Florack and Jason Kyrwood, co-heads of our finance group, deserve immense credit for building up a market-leading practice in which promotional opportunities are both possible and necessary to meet client demand. As important, during a period of ongoing growth, they have worked with our other partners and our professional development manager, Kristen Ramos, to maintain a truly collegial culture within our group. Meyer Dworkin, a partner in our group, served as my informal partner mentor throughout the years, which happened organically after I worked with him on a number of

deals shortly after I joined the group. Jeong Lee, also a partner in our group, went out of her way in the years leading up to my promotion to provide me with advice and support. But honestly, each of the current and former partners in our group played a meaningful role in my career development, as did partners across Davis Polk given our multidisciplinary practice.

**What advice you could give an associate who wants to make partner?** First and foremost, associates who want to make partner should seek to find an area of law that genuinely excites them and a group of lawyers in that practice area with whom they could envision working with closely for years to come. Finding that fit could require an associate to make a lateral move at some point in their career, which is a decision that must be thought through from multiple angles. I also think it's important for associates to find a true partner mentor and to have an open dialogue with her or him about career goals, including the desire to be promoted. Promotions are ultimately a group decision, so it's also key to work with as many partners as possible and to create meaningful connections with them both on and off deals (which is often more effective to do in-person). And, of course, associates should seek to create the same type of connections with clients and counterparties.

**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?** Adhering to the advice I provided immediately above, in particular building meaningful connections with as many partners and clients as possible,



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can be difficult to achieve in practice, given the numerous other professional and personal obligations that associates have. But I do think the key to success within a law firm is taking the time to forge and then foster those relationships, which should also result in a more rewarding experience as an associate.

**What challenges, if any, did you face or had to overcome in your career path and what was the lesson learned? How did it affect or influence your career?** I feel very fortunate for beginning my career as an associate at a leading New York-headquartered law firm like Davis Polk. Attending Berkeley Law set me up for success in the on-campus interview process, but I was nonetheless stunned when I received an offer from a firm like Davis Polk, only in part because I had never visited New York prior to my callback interviews. There weren't any real roadblocks to getting my foot in the door in our summer associate program; at the time it just wasn't foreseeable to me, having just finished up college in Omaha, Nebraska, during the onset of the financial crisis and not being sure what to do next. So, when I started at the firm, I thought that I should take advantage of the opportunity provided to me and work hard.