

Rise and Shine: Increasing Firm Visibility as a Young Partner

No matter your level within a firm, you are likely going to find yourself in a situation where your colleagues do not know who you are. Learn the necessities of the new environment and to be willing to adapt.

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From the Editor: Natalie Bennett, a trial lawyer with Morgan Lewis and a 2019 NLJ D.C. Rising Star, writes about best practices for cultivating visibility as a young partner at a large law firm. And she takes the traditional mantra of “do good work and the rest will follow” a few steps further. To rise through the ranks and maximize visibility, young lawyers must be: adaptable, clutch team players and engage in pro bono service. For more in the latest column in our “On the Rise: Voices from Young Lawyers” series, read on. —Lisa Helem, editor-in-chief, *The National Law Journal*

To be visible in a law firm is to have a profile that sets you apart from your peers. Visibility as an associate or young partner means someone who is “front of mind.” This is the person those with established client relationships first think of when it is time to pitch a new matter. The person is known as a “firm citizen” and a “superstar.”

While visibility does not perfectly translate into making all your Big Law dreams come, it is certainly a prerequisite for law firm longevity. But it doesn’t happen by accident. Here are some “best practices” for raising your profile at your firm:

Be a Team Player and Trusted Adviser.

You should be visible for the right reasons. Hopefully your goal is to be visible for your pleasant demeanor and willingness to assist your



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colleagues and clients rather than for your bad attitude. Life in a law firm can involve confrontations and inequity. However, the more you can stay focused on the ultimate team goals—like winning a case or closing a deal—the better positioned you will be in the long run to advance as someone who is easy to work with.

You will also be more visible by promoting others and helping identify opportunities for them than you will be if you only look out for yourself. So be willing to invest in your firm relationships. They will prove even more valuable later.

Be Willing to Reinvent Yourself.

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your colleagues do not know who you are. Learn the necessities of the new environment and to be willing to adapt.

New Associates: You may have gone to law school with a singular focus in terms of practice area or industry. Whatever preconceived notions you had about what you thought you were supposed to do when you got to the firm, throw those out the window. The best opportunities are often the ones you never saw coming. Do not turn down assignments in an area in which you have no experience. Pursue the opportunity with an open mind and consider that you may not have enough experience to know where it may lead. When that random matter or random client comes along—the one that scares you because you feel ill-equipped—“Say yes.” All too often those scary invitations are the opportunities that lead to finding your place within a firm.

New Partners: Whatever laurels you earned as a stand-out associate may not translate to visibility at the partnership level. Your task now is to begin again. Until you have your own client following, the key is to find your niche. Be open to new

kinds of matters or a different set of responsibilities. Find a role where you can redefine yourself as a valuable resource to the partnership. This may mean being more specialized than you were as an associate, gaining expertise you never had or supporting a team you have never worked with before. The bottom line: even as a partner you need to take risks in order to succeed.

Laterals: Gaining visibility as a lateral can be difficult. When you move firms, you lose years of social capital and institutional knowledge. To be visible as a lateral, dive in headfirst. Bet on yourself. You can impress your new colleagues with your work ethic, your specialized knowledge and your desire to serve your new firm’s clients. But you need to be “all in.” Go above and beyond to fit your practice into your new firm’s platform. And ensure that your new colleagues feel rewarded for bringing you into the fold.

Spend Time on Non-Billable or Pro Bono Activities.

Do not be that person who is only known for billable work. Also become visible for making the firm and the world a better place. Join committees. Establish yourself as a leader internally

and externally through professional organizations and the local bar.

Give back to the community. Not only will a diverse set of interests make you more appealing to clients, but these activities will also make you feel good about yourself. Firms today are not interested in their talent being one-dimensional. They are investing in people who, in addition to being essential to clients, will help raise the firm’s external profile. Do not be afraid to dedicate time to the non-billable or pro bono causes you care about.

Lastly, pro bono opportunities not only provide representation to those in need. This work can also serve as a launching pad. Pro bono cases are a phenomenal way to collaborate with lawyers in other practice groups and to hone your substantive skills. A pro bono victory is an achievement that the entire firm can be proud of and makes your client’s story visible to the world.

Natalie Bennett is an intellectual property trial and appellate attorney. She has been trying cases for the past 10 years and was thrilled to recently join the partnership at Morgan, Lewis & Bockius.