

How I Made Practice Group Leader: 'There Is No Substitute for Hard Work,' Says Ryan Junck of Skadden

By Tasha Norman

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Ryan Junck, 44, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom, London, UK

Job title: Head of Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom's European litigation/controversy practices.

Practice area: White-collar defense and investigations.

Law school and year of graduation: Michigan, 2003.

How long have you been at the firm? A bit more than 15 years. I joined the firm in the fall of 2007. I was promoted to my current role in the summer of 2022, and have been a partner since 2014.

Were you a partner at another firm before joining your present firm? I joined Skadden after a clerkship in Nebraska (my home state) and three years at another global law firm in New York.

What do you think was the deciding point for the firm to appoint you to your current role? I've been fortunate to work in four Skadden offices during my time at the firm—New York, Chicago, Palo Alto and London—and spend significant time in many more offices around the world as various cases unfolded over the years. This has enabled me to develop close relationships with many colleagues and (hopefully) a solid understanding of their respective practices and markets. My experience

working in multiple locations and the related relationships helped position me to take on this role.

What's the key to successful business development in your opinion? Go slow

and be authentic. While all of us love getting cold

calls from prospective clients, the reality is that most business is predicated on the existence of a relationship. Building and maintaining relationships takes time, but without authenticity they will be transactional and fragile. I'd like to be known as someone who truly has a client's best interest at heart, personally and professionally. Someone who will bend over backwards to help them solve whatever problem they are facing.

Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to your current role?

There are countless people inside and outside the firm who have helped me over the years, but I'd like to flag two of them in particular. I joined the firm because of David Zornow, who previously



Ryan Junck of Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom.

Courtesy photo

led Skadden's white-collar practice and was the global head of litigation. David mentored me since day one, teaching me how to practice law and be a professional while enjoying life (and a good meal) along the way. After I moved to London in 2014, Scott Simpson, who was the co-head of Skadden's global transactions practices, took me under his wing and taught me how to manage clients and build a practice. Scott, who passed away earlier this year, was a true friend and loyal colleague to everyone throughout the European partnership, as well as to many of our clients. I miss his friendship and guidance pretty much every day, particularly as we try to maintain the culture and platform that he worked so hard to build.

What's the best piece of advice you could give to a partner who is interested in leading a practice group? I try to consider different perspectives and give people a chance to be heard and contribute to the group's approach. Keeping everyone informed, listening to their views, and getting folks aligned behind a strategy takes time, but it's the best way to build a positive culture and practice.

Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give to your younger self? I think it's incredibly important for junior associates to

have a view and speak up, and for more senior colleagues to create an environment where that's encouraged and appreciated. The best lawyers I've worked with typically offer their views last, partly so as not to influence more junior colleagues, but also because they are constantly reevaluating their own views.

What three words, phrases, goals or mantras would you use to describe your work mindset? My father is a farmer in Nebraska, and while that couldn't be farther away from Big Law, he had the same mantra as the first partner I ever worked for: There is no substitute for hard work. It was true when I was a kid, when I was a junior associate, and now. If you want to be really good at this sort of job, you have to put in the work.

Please share with us any firm initiatives you are working on. I have served as lead partner and point of contact on a number of pro bono projects over the years, most notably related to immigration work with the International Refugee Assistance Project. Pro bono work is a core aspect of the firm's culture, and I am proud of the many hours dedicated by firm participants and inspired by the continued impact achieved through our partnerships in a wide variety of pro bono matters.