

How I Made Partner: 'Don't Be Afraid to Step Outside of Your Comfort Zone,' Says Evan Hill of Skadden

By ALM Staff

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Practice area: Corporate restructuring

Law school and year of graduation: Fordham Law School, 2011

The following has been edited for style.

How long have you been at the firm?

I have been at the firm for 10 years.

What was your criteria in selecting your current firm?

I wanted to work on highly sophisticated, novel and challenging transactions. A firm culture that valued teamwork, creativity and collaboration was also important to me.

Were you an associate at another firm before joining your present firm? If so, which one and how long were you there?

I was an associate at White & Case from 2011-2014. I worked in the mergers and acquisitions practice, primarily focused on buy-side private equity deals. There, I developed a strong foundation of transactional skills that translated effectively into restructuring work when I moved to Skadden.

What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in making you partner? Was it your performance on a specific case? A personality

trait? Making connections with the right people?

I think my promotion was based upon a combination of factors, including technical expertise, leadership ability, and business development potential. Factors such as having subject matter expertise and effective lawyering are preconditions to being considered for promotion. I believe it was critically important to promotion decision making that associates in the practice viewed me as a mentor and leader and that clients trusted me with their most important matters.

Who had or has the greatest influence in your career and why?

I am very fortunate to have had many mentors over the years. These individuals have devoted their time and energy to advancing my career and professional development. One mentor in particular is Jay Goffman. Jay was the global head of Skadden's corporate restructuring department when I joined Skadden in 2014 through his retirement in 2020. Jay was a leader in the restructuring industry, having pioneered quick, efficient "prepackaged" bankruptcy cases in the 1990s.



EVAN HILL OF SKADDEN, ARPS, SLATE, MEAGHER & FLOM.

Courtesy photo

I worked closely with Jay on many transactions during my formative years as a lawyer. He trusted me and provided me with many opportunities to grow, learn and ultimately lead transactions. He also introduced me into various industry organizations and charities. Jay is now co-CEO and co-president of Smith Goffman Partners, a boutique restructuring advisory firm. I am often one of Jay's first calls when he is in need of restructuring counsel for a client.

What advice would you give an associate who wants to make partner?

Be proactive, curious and highly responsive. Focus on how you can be most effective and contribute to the team. Seize opportunities to present and lead calls or meetings, starting with discrete items that you have mastered. Do not be afraid to step outside of your comfort zone and take risks.

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?

In a fast-paced and busy environment, it is sometimes challenging to take a step back and take stock of where you are in your career and where you are going. For example, are you gaining experience across a diverse set of matter types? Are you working on matters with multiple partners in your practice? Are you getting opportunities to grow and step into leadership roles? Are you getting exposure to partners in other practice areas? Are you involved in extracurriculars, e.g., publishing articles and joining industry organizations and charities? I have learned that it takes intention to zoom out, assess the bigger picture, and decide where to focus efforts in specific areas.

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?

As with any practice, certain times are busier than others. Restructuring in particular is countercyclical, meaning that we are typically busier when other transactional practices slow down, and vice versa. It can be a challenge for any associate to remain consistently busy, especially during those slower periods.

I dealt with this challenge by becoming proficient in transactional areas beyond restructuring, such as capital markets and M&A. I got to know some of the partners in those areas through my work on restructuring deals that involved transactional offshoots. I was successfully able to leverage those relationships during slower restructuring periods to stay busy. For example, I worked on high yield bond issuances, leveraged buyout transactions, initial public offerings, and SPAC transactions, all as a restructuring associate or counsel. This work translated into consistently high hours year-over-year, helped me forge relationships with partners in other practices and develop additional knowledge and skills.

Knowing what you know now about your career path, what advice would you give to your younger self?

I would tell my younger self to be less afraid of failing and to take more (calculated) risks. For example, some of the associates that I am most impressed with today are those that confidently speak up in meetings with clients and partners to suggest well-thought-out ideas. Even if those ideas do not ultimately work out, they may prompt productive discussion and contribute to a collaborative dynamic.

**Do you utilize technology to benefit the firm/
practice and/or business development?**

Video conferencing has emerged as a permanent fixture in today's post-COVID work environment. Seeing your clients face-to-face produces much more effective communication than audio-only phone calls. Notwithstanding that we are back in the office four days a week, I have found that clients continue to favor video conferencing as a primary means of communication. In addition, networking on social media platforms is an effective way to follow industry trends and movements. From a business development standpoint, I use social media to grow my contacts at the investment banks and financial advisory firms that we often work with on restructuring matters.

How would you describe your work mindset?

Our core focus at Skadden is achieving extraordinary results for our clients. Our ethos is accordingly client-focused at all times. This is for good reason: The stakes in our matters are incredibly high, where at times our client's very survival is on the line. Restructuring in particular also can be very complex, often resembling a multi-dimensional chess game where stakeholders with differing (if not diametrically opposed) interests are in competition over limited assets. Practically speaking, success requires creativity, collaboration and resilience. I strive to exhibit these qualities in every interaction.

If you participate in firm or industry initiatives, please mention the initiatives you are working on as well as the impact you hope to achieve.

Giving back is a core element of Skadden culture. Pro bono work is valued and prioritized from the moment that you walk through the door. I have represented dozens of pro bono clients over the years, primarily in the not-for-profit space. This work has involved corporate governance, tax exemption, and mergers and acquisitions. My clients have included philharmonic orchestras, soup kitchens, after-school programs, community improvement organizations, medical research foundations, and more.

These are organizations that have a direct and positive impact on people's lives in New York City. I am very proud of what my pro bono clients have achieved and the role I have played for them. The restructuring community is tight knit. I learned early in my career that restructuring professionals actively participate in industry organizations and charities.

I am now involved in organizations including the New York City Bar Association's bankruptcy and reorganization committee, the Turnaround Management Association, the American Bankruptcy Institute, and charities such as Catholic Renewal, an organization that raises donations to provide millions of meals per year to hungry New Yorkers. Becoming involved in these organizations has been immensely rewarding, both personally and professionally. I encourage young associates to get involved early in their careers.