

How I Made Partner: 'Strive to Present the Best Version of Yourself Every Day,' Says Liana-Marie Lien of Skadden

By ALM Staff

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Liana-Marie Lien, 37, Partner at Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom, New York, New York

Practice area(s): Financial institutions; mergers and acquisitions; insurance

Law school and year of graduation: Brooklyn Law School, 2015

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?

Expertise and reputation were front of mind, but what has always set Skadden apart for me—and one of the biggest reasons why I have built my career at Skadden—is our culture and the investment in our people. As a summer associate I saw firsthand that associates received opportunities to engage in meaningful work and were supported through well-established mentoring programs.

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

No, I have been with Skadden since my 1L summer (a very memorable summer!). Prior to law school, I worked at two other large law firms for four years as a litigation paralegal and clerk.

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?

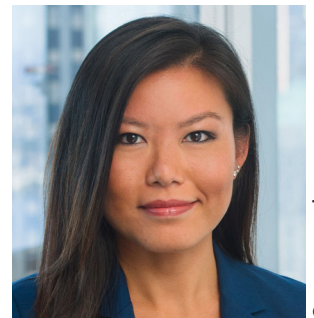
I don't think there was one single deciding point. I believe consistency makes for the most lasting impression: consistency in excellence, in effort and in showing up as your genuine self. This builds

trust and provides for opportunities, whether it's the firm making you partner or a client hiring you for a new matter.

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

I am fortunate to have had the guidance and support of many people, beginning with my parents, who taught me from an early age to be disciplined and to work hard. My first boss out of college, the former director of litigation resources at Cleary Gottlieb, Maria Rodriguez was a force to be reckoned with, set the tone for excellence in the workplace, and inspired me to go to law school. Additionally, my brilliant colleagues at Skadden, and notably, the inimitable head of the firm's financial institutions group and insurance M&A practice, Todd Freed, continues to demonstrate what it means to be an innovative, client-focused leader.

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



Liana-Marie Lien of Skadden.

Courtesy photo

Strive to present the best version of yourself every day. Anyone who has been elevated to partner will tell you that the process is rigorous and the reasons for making partner may not always be clear or within your control. The best thing you can do is to learn as much as you can, whether directly or indirectly related to your practice, and from anyone you can, partners, other associates and paralegals alike. Having a diverse range of experiences and perspectives will enhance your creativity and overall legal skills which will make you a more effective lawyer and adviser. You also never know what hidden opportunities or connections you will access or make.

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?

Working among high achievers, I often see attorneys agonizing over the “right” or “best” career moves. While there's comfort in having a plan, we often forget that the person you are today may not be the same person tomorrow. Priorities change. Our views of what we want for ourselves in the future are limited by our life experiences today. Make a plan, but be open to new opportunities. I “fell” into the insurance practice by chance and needless to say, it has been the most rewarding experience of my career.

What challenges, if any, did you face or have to overcome in your career path and what was the lesson learned? How did it affect or influence your career?

My career path was not straightforward and I have had my fair share of setbacks both professionally and personally. But with every defining moment of failure that I can remember, I learned something more about myself, I adapted and I found a different way to succeed in my own right. Through these experiences, I have grown increasingly more comfortable with being uncomfortable and much more confident in my own abilities, knowing there's always a silver lining at the end of the day.

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

Trust your instincts and tune out the noise. Everyone's career path looks different and staying true to yourself, exploring options, seizing opportunities and consistently showing up prepared and ready to do your best will help ensure you find the right path to success.

How do you utilize technology to benefit the firm/practice and/or business development?

Technology has always been an integral part of my practice to share knowledge and improve accuracy and overall efficiency. In my day to day, I rely on news aggregators to stay on top of industry trends and ever-advancing research tools. I am looking forward to further exploring efficiencies that can be achieved through measured use of AI.

How would you describe your work mindset?

At work and in my personal life, I tend to be growth minded. I love learning and enjoy the process of working through challenges and developing skills—I recently started taking salsa and golf lessons! In many respects, this mindset has helped me thrive in an environment like Skadden's where we are often faced with novel and challenging legal issues that require adaptability and creativity.

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.

I have been and am a proud supporter of firm and industry initiatives that bring people together. These initiatives can take many different forms, including supporting employee group initiatives, mentoring associates, sponsoring industry events, and partnering with clients to provide pro bono legal services. These efforts are invaluable opportunities to connect and build community, and also lend themselves to driving innovation in the ever-evolving legal and insurance industries.