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THE RECORDER

June 12, 2026

DEALMAKERS OF THE YEAR FINALISTS:

SONIA NIJJAR

SKADDEN, ARPS, SLATE, MEAGHER & FLOM

Sonia Nijjar of Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom is one of the finalists of The Recorder's Dealmakers of the Year award. Read a Q&A with her below.

What are some of your most significant achievements of the past year?

This past year, I've focused on leading complex technology transactions in sectors where both the opportunity and the scrutiny are high, particularly semiconductors and AI. Many of these deals involved cross-border elements and evolving regulatory dynamics, often without a clear playbook. What I'm most proud of is helping clients move forward in that environment, structuring around uncertainty, preserving momentum, and finding practical paths to execution where others might pause. In several cases, that meant rethinking traditional approaches to risk allocation or deal sequencing. At this level, clients are looking for judgment as much as analysis, and being the adviser they rely on in those moments is what I find most meaningful.

Describe a significant challenge you faced regarding this achievement and how you overcame it.

The most consistent challenge has been navigating ambiguity, particularly around regulatory posture and timing, without slowing down the deal. In many situations, there is no single right answer and waiting for certainty is not an option. My approach has been to define a set of viable paths forward, with clear risks and trade-offs, so clients can make informed decisions while maintaining momentum. That requires being direct and pragmatic, translating complex issues into clear, actionable guidance. The goal is not to eliminate uncertainty, but to manage it in a way that allows the transaction to proceed thoughtfully and efficiently.

What does it take to become a trusted transactional lawyer in California?

In California, and particularly in the technology sector, clients expect advisers who can operate at the intersection of legal complexity, business strategy, and speed. Technology companies move quickly, and transactions often raise novel issues, whether around regulatory exposure, intellectual property, or evolving business models. Being a trusted adviser requires the ability to distill complexity, provide clear and practical guidance, and adapt in real time as circumstances change. It also requires a strong understanding of how these companies think, how they assess risk, and how they make decisions under pressure. Trust is built through consistency, sound judgment, and the ability to deliver commercially grounded advice in high-stakes situations.

What advice would you give to someone who is starting out in your field?

Early on, focus on becoming technically strong. That foundation matters more than anything else. At the same time, pay attention to how deals actually get done. Listen closely on calls, watch how negotiations unfold, and notice what moves a discussion forward versus what stalls it. The lawyers who stand out are the ones who understand not just the legal points, but what the client is trying to achieve and how to get there. It is also worth paying attention to how the practice itself is evolving. Tools like AI are already part of how work gets done, and learning how to use them thoughtfully alongside your own judgment will put you in a stronger position.