

Business & Practice

Why Mentoring Matters: Skadden's Nesa Amamoo

By Nesa Amamoo

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In our “Why Mentoring Matters” series, Nesa Amamoo, a partner in the real estate practice at Skadden, discusses how she was mentored by Audrey Sokoloff, the global head of the firm’s transactions practices, among others. She says having Sokoloff as a sponsor in the traditionally male-dominated practice and the firm’s culture of transparency has been invaluable in developing her career, and that she strives to pay it forward.

Mentoring encompasses much more than the training that a senior attorney provides a colleague to help them evolve and become a better and more skilled professional. Training is an important aspect of the relationship, to be sure, but it represents only a part of mentoring’s significance.

Audrey Sokoloff, the global head of Skadden’s transactions practices, has acted as my mentor and sponsor, starting when she provided me with my very first assignment as a first-year associate. While Audrey works on some of the industry’s largest and most complex transactions and is extremely active in Skadden’s management, she always seems to have time to offer guidance and support—whether that be taking time out for a coffee break outside of the office or dropping by my office to engage in a post-client meeting de-brief and strategy session.

Over the years, her mentorship has extended far beyond training, contributing not only to my professional and career development, but also to the growth and continuing success of my department and the firm.

Professional Development

In large part, you learn how to do your job from those who came before you, and at a firm like Skadden, that means learning from many of the most prominent and accomplished attorneys in your field. Such training is particularly important in our real estate practice.

As general practitioners, we handle anything and everything that touches on real estate, including acquisitions, development and other infrastructure projects, hospitality and gaming, fund formations, sale/leasebacks, securities offerings and workouts, recapitalizations—you name it. The need to learn never wanes and having mentors invested in your development is essential for your growth.

Working with a partner like Audrey, who is known for having an open door and a sincere commitment to her team members' success, has enabled me to develop the skills needed to join her as a partner.

Career Development

No one is better positioned to help you reach your goals, or even to figure out what those may be, than people who have traveled the same path. When I started in Skadden's New York office in the fall of 2006 as a first-year associate, I planned to stay for a handful of years and then transition into private equity.

My friends at other firms were shocked to learn that I told my mentors at Skadden of my career ambitions. My friends said, "I would never tell partners about my plans. They would just stop giving me deals. It would be the kiss of death."

But a culture of transparency, openness, and commitment to development allowed me to have frank conversations with Audrey and other Skadden partners that helped me refine and achieve my vision.

They assisted in directing my practice toward the private equity work I was most passionate about. They helped train me for the career I wanted, whether I remained at Skadden or not. My partners kept me involved in new matters within my area of interest. They gave me opportunities to join client pitches and included me in focused trainings.

They offered valuable insights from their experiences, including one piece of advice I share with all of my mentees: "Your career is a marathon, not a sprint. Consider where you want to be, not now, but in several years, and then let's work to take the steps to get you there."

As my career vision evolved and I began to see that I wanted to be a partner at Skadden, my mentors helped guide my path to achieving that goal.

Culture and Collaboration

The real estate industry has historically been male-dominated. Finding a mentor like Audrey and others at Skadden who encourage diversified leadership and cultivate access to opportunities for growth is so important.

I have personally reaped the benefits of Skadden's formal training and leadership programs (including our Career Sponsorship and Women's Leadership programs) as well as real estate specific programs within my department. I am excited to remain active in such programs and help to pave the way for newer attorneys.

But mentoring is not a one-way transaction. One succeeds, in large part, through teamwork—especially at Skadden, where a commitment to collaboration is central to our culture and success.

Audrey and others have dedicated themselves to my development not only because they have big hearts and are sincerely invested in my success but also because when one of us succeeds, we all do. At Skadden, a client is not "my" or "your" client—it's "our" client.

Skadden’s foundational values—teamwork, innovation, diversity, a commitment to “upper margin” work and client service—have been passed on by generations of attorneys who understand the value of mentorship.

As a relatively new partner—I was part of Skadden’s 2021 partnership class—I’m excited to take on more mentorship responsibilities. Though I continue to regularly knock on Audrey’s door to discuss work, family, and more, I am grateful for the opportunities I now have to continue the cycle by providing similar support to the newer members of our team.

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