

Briefs

MAKING PARTNER ■ MERGERS ■ MANNERS ■ IN MEMORIAM ■ DIVERSITY

Seven Years to Make Partner, Lawyers Say in Survey

It takes an average of seven years to reach partner status today, according to a survey of attorneys by Robert Half Legal. That figure is down from eight years when the survey was conducted in 2003.

Lawyers were asked, “What would you estimate is the average number of years it takes for an associate to make partner?” The median response was seven years.

“The time it takes to make partner has declined slightly, but competition remains high,” said Charles Volkert, executive director of Robert Half Legal. “Some firms have reduced the number of partner positions, which has prompted associates to seek alternative career options, such as a non-equity partner track or another less traditional path.”

The demographics at a given firm also can impede or hasten an associate’s route to partner, Volkert noted. “If



a firm’s most senior partners have postponed retirement, there may be fewer openings for associates,” he said.

Robert Half Legal offered the following advice to lawyers interested in advancing their careers:

- Focus on professional development. In addition to legal skills, concentrate on helping the firm improve client service levels and grow revenue.
- Align yourself with a mentor or career coach. Find a more senior attorney who can provide advice and guidance, as well as help you identify ways to raise your visibility at the firm.

- Immerse yourself in the profession. Become involved in the local chapter of the bar association, do pro bono work, volunteer in the community or contribute to well-regarded legal publications or forums online. All these activities will enhance your professional reputation.
- Network consistently. Expand your roster of professional contacts and stay in regular communication with them. The more people you know, the more likely it is that you’ll hear of new opportunities that could help you keep your career on track. ■

Law Firm Mergers Up Sharply From Last Year

There were 14 law firm mergers and acquisitions announced in the United States in the third quarter of 2011, according to *Altman Weil MergerLine*. The total number of 2011 combinations announced from January through September is 43, up 79 percent compared to the same nine-month period in 2010.

“It looks like the law firm merger market is back,” said Altman Weil principal Ward Bower. “This is the fourth strong quarter in a row we’ve seen, and we’re aware of a lot of activity in the pipeline.”

The largest law firm combination announced in the third quarter was 500-lawyer, Boston-based Edwards Angell Palmer & Dodge’s acquisition of Wildman Harrold Allen & Dixon, a 160-lawyer Chicago firm.

There were two other sizeable deals. Indianapolis-based Ice Miller announced its intention to merge with Columbus, Ohio firm Schottenstein Zox and Dunn to form a new 300-lawyer law firm. The acquisition of 67-lawyer Jackson, Miss. firm Watkins Ludlam by Jones Walker, a 300-lawyer New Orleans firm, was also announced.

The remaining eleven combinations were all acquisitions of firms with 35 or fewer lawyers, continuing the 2011 trend of smaller deals.

Regional expansion continued to be a driver, with California as a target of interest for three firms. Philadelphia’s Fox Rothschild and Kansas City-based Polsinelli Shugart both picked up Los Angeles boutiques in the third quarter. Dallas-based litigation firm McKool Smith acquired 35-lawyer Los Angeles firm, Hennigan Dorman. ■

Manners Matter When it Comes to Advancing at Work, Study Shows

It still pays to play nice at work, a new Robert Half survey confirms. Nearly half (48 percent) of workers interviewed said being courteous to others can help an employee rise through the ranks. Another 41 percent said etiquette plays at least some role in career advancement.

Workers were asked, "In your opinion, to what extent does being courteous to coworkers positively impact a person's career prospects?" Their responses: Greatly, it can accelerate advancement (48 percent); Somewhat, but skills play a bigger role (41 percent); and No impact at all, it's who or what you know (10 percent).

Workers were also asked to recount the worst or wackiest etiquette blunders they've witnessed or heard about in the workplace. Here are some of the more memorable anecdotes:

- "While collaborating on a project, I saw an employee yell, 'Forget this!' and throw all the papers she was holding into the air as she walked out."
- "A coworker fell asleep at her desk and another team member took a picture of her snoozing and sent it to the boss."
- "A colleague of mine would actually clip his nails at his desk while working."
- "Someone was stealing other people's lunches from the lounge area."
- "A colleague purposely sneezed in the boss's coffee cup."

"In most cases, a minor etiquette slipup won't likely be career-limiting if you quickly acknowledge it and learn from your mistake," said Brett Good, a senior district president for Robert Half International. "But continual missteps have a cumulative effect that can chip away at your professional reputation and get in the way of advancement."

Robert Half offers four tips on steering clear of some of the more common etiquette offenses:

Keep it 'PG-rated.' Salty language, off-color comments and politically incorrect jokes can get you into hot water. When you wonder if you should say something or not, that's your internal voice telling you to zip it. Play it safe and watch your words.

Don't air grievances publicly. Harshly criticizing colleagues in front of others or gossiping behind their backs typically only makes you look bad. Address problems with coworkers head-on, but do it respectfully and in private.

Take a breather. Although co-workers may do things that irritate you, take a minute to collect your thoughts before raising your voice or firing off a rude email. Losing your cool will exacerbate your problems.

Put the tweezers away. It's called personal care for a reason. Confine your grooming activities to your home, or at least the restroom. The goal is to win over – not offend – your fellow employees. ■

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Dec. 1, 2011, Age 80

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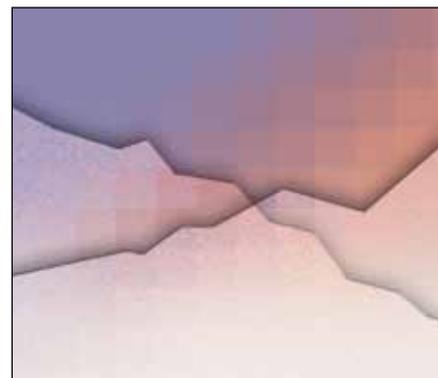
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Minority Numbers Recover While Women Associates Extend Two-Year Decline

Law firms have made up some but not all of the lost ground after diversity figures fell in 2010, according to the NALP Directory of Legal Employers. While the representation of minorities increased, more than making up for the decrease from 2009 to 2010, the overall representation of women declined slightly further in 2011 compared with 2010.

In 2011, the percentage of both women and minority partners in law firms was up by a small amount compared with 2010. Among associates, however, representation of women declined slightly for the second year in a row and for only the second time since NALP started compiling this information in the 1990s. The net effect was that, for lawyers as a whole, representation of women overall decreased by a tiny amount and the representation of minority women remained about flat. For minorities as a whole, representation was up slightly. Minorities now make up 12.70 percent of lawyers reported in the NALP Directory of Legal Employers, compared with 12.40 percent in 2010. Just under one-third of lawyers at these same firms are women — 32.61 percent in 2011 compared with 32.69 percent in 2010, both of these most recent years lower than the 32.97 percent mark reached in 2009. Minority women now account for just over 6 percent of lawyers at these firms — 6.23 percent in 2011, comparable to the 6.20 percent figure for 2010, and lower than the 6.33 percent figure for 2009.

During most of the 19 years that NALP has been compiling this information, law firms had made steady, if somewhat slow progress in increasing the presence of women and minorities in both the partner and associate ranks. In 2011, that slow upward trend continued for partners, with minorities accounting for 6.56 percent of partners in the nation's major firms, and women accounting for 19.54 percent of the partners in these firms. In 2010, the figures were 6.16 percent and 19.43 percent, respectively. Nonetheless, the total change since



1993, the first year for which NALP has comparable aggregate information, has been only marginal. At that time minorities accounted for 2.55 percent of partners, and women accounted for 12.27 percent of partners. Among associates, the percentage of women had increased from 38.99 percent in 1993 to 45.66 percent in 2009, before falling back to 45.41 percent in 2010 and to 45.35 percent in 2011. Over the same period, minority percentages have increased from 8.36 percent to 19.90 percent, more than recovering from a slight decline to 19.53 percent in 2010.

Minority women continue to be the most dramatically underrepresented group at the partnership level, a pattern that holds across all firm sizes and most jurisdictions. Minority women make up just more than 2 percent of the partners in the nation's major law firms. At just 2.04 percent of partners in 2011, this group continues to be particularly underrepresented in the partnership ranks, despite a small increase from 1.95 percent in 2010. The representation of minority women partners is only a bit higher, 2.47 percent, at the largest firms of more than 700 lawyers. Minority men, meanwhile, account for just 4.52 percent of partners this year, up from 4.21 percent in 2010. At the associate level, minorities account for 19.90 percent of associates, up from 19.53 percent in 2010, and minority women account for 10.96 percent of associates, a tiny increase from 10.90 in 2010, and still below the 11.02 percent figure reached in 2009. In Philadelphia, the number of minority women partners stands at just 1.18 percent. ■

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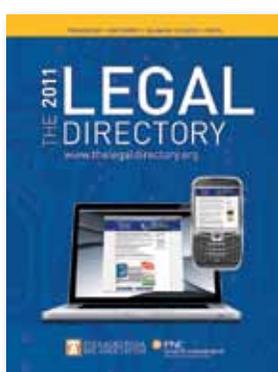
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