

How We Made Partner: 'Stay Mindful of the Big Picture,' Say Jenna Smith & Lauren Goldman of Boies Schiller Flexner

By ALM Staff

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Lauren Goldman, 35, Partner at Boies Schiller Flexner, New York City, New York;

Jenna Smith, 37, Partner at Boies Schiller Flexner, Albany, New York

Practice area: Litigation

Law school and year of graduation: Goldman:

Georgetown University Law Center, 2014;

Smith: University of Washington School of Law, 2014

The following has been edited for style.

How long have you been at the firm?

Goldman: I joined the firm in March 2019, so a bit over five years.

Smith: I joined in June 2016, so almost eight years.

What was your criteria in selecting your current firm?

Goldman: I started my career at another large law firm practicing employment litigation and then completed a two-year District Court clerkship. After those experiences, I knew I wanted to join a law firm that focused on complex commercial litigation where I could evolve my practice and obtain stand-up



Courtesy photos

Jenna Smith, left, and Lauren Goldman, right, of Boies Schiller Flexner.

courtroom experience. I was also looking for a law firm that had a collaborative culture. After completing my interviews, I had a gut feeling that Boies Schiller was going to be a great fit for me. And it has been. I am still so grateful to have been given the opportunity to join the firm.

Smith: The experience I would get at Boies Schiller was a contributing factor for me as well. I've always been interested in plaintiff-side class action work, so initially my search was limited to firms that only did work in that space. While clerking in the N.D.N.Y., I discovered that Boies Schiller had a vibrant

plaintiff-side class action practice, while also providing the opportunity to work alongside some of the best commercial litigators in a variety of practice areas, which seemed like the best of both worlds. In addition, I'm from upstate New York and the idea of being able to do high-level commercial litigation while living close to my family was always a dream of mine. Boies Schiller was one of very few firms to check all of those boxes.

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

Smith: I spent almost a year prior to my clerkship at Terrell Marshall Law Group, a boutique class action firm in Seattle.

Goldman: And I was an associate at Sidley Austin in their Los Angeles office for two years.

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?

Goldman: I think there were a number of factors at play. Over the last five years, I have worked on a variety of complex cases that allowed me to showcase my legal and interpersonal skills to a broad group of partners within the firm. This included being part of a trial team that won a liability verdict after a three-week jury trial, as well as playing a critical leadership role on the *In re Grupo Televisa* class action in which we obtained a \$95 million settlement on behalf of the class. I have also devoted time to cultivating relationships inside and outside of

the firm, which has led to strong connections with colleagues and clients, and has resulted in business development opportunities.

Smith: I agree that it is likely a combination of factors. As an associate in a smaller office, my path to making partner relied on fostering relationships and working on teams in other offices, which I have done since I started at the firm. I also drew upon my prior work on plaintiff-side class actions and devoted a fair amount of time to business development in that area. Finally, I've always placed an emphasis on maintaining strong relationships, including with current and former colleagues, court staff, opposing counsel, and in my personal life. Those relationships have proven helpful in various ways throughout my time at the firm.

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

Smith: When I was a junior in college, I spent a semester interning for Kirsten Gillibrand when she was first elected to Congress and represented my home district. We stayed in touch and eventually she offered me my first job after college when she was appointed to the U.S. Senate. I served as her "body person" leading up to her first state-wide election, which meant I traveled with her and attempted to keep everything running smoothly (think Gary from the show *Veep*).

It was an incredible opportunity to gain first-hand access to the legislative process, including the passing of the Dodd-Frank Act. Sen. Gillibrand, as a former securities litigator and member of the Senate Agriculture Committee

(which oversees derivatives), took on a leading role with that legislation and was instrumental in my decision to attend law school. The senator, who is also a Boies Schiller alum, has always been a tremendous mentor and sounding board throughout my career.

Goldman: For me, it's the judge I clerked for, Judge Amy Berman Jackson on the District Court for the District of Columbia. Judge Jackson has so many qualities that I admire and try to emulate. She is a fair and impartial judge, a critical thinker, and a fantastic writer. But she is also a mother, someone who loves art and culture, and who has an incredible sense of humor. Watching her work, and having her as a mentor, has had a huge impact on the way I view myself as I navigate my career.

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

Goldman: I think it is very easy to get swept into the narrative that once you start at a law firm your goal is to make partner. I would first recommend that associates try to gain insight into the roles and responsibilities of various partners to understand if that is the career path that fits them. If being partner is still the goal, then associates should do their best work possible on each case and become critical to their case teams. They should also start thinking about business development early in their careers and continue to cultivate their relationships with friends and classmates.

Smith: Oftentimes at a law firm, you can become so bogged down with the day-to-day work that it is hard to stay mindful of the big

picture. It's important to periodically check in with yourself and your mentors to make sure you have realistic goals in mind for that practice year and that your current case assignments will be conducive to achieving those goals. And then be proactive in ensuring that you will be able to reach them. For example, I was looking for an opportunity to gain trial skills and it didn't seem like any of my current cases would be heading to trial anytime soon, so I took on a pro bono trial which allowed me to develop those skills and showed that I was willing to go the extra mile to seek the experience I needed.

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?

Goldman: One common mistake associates make is working for only one or two partners. Working for multiple partners allows an associate to learn from various people on different types of cases and provides more opportunities to gain mentors and advocates for partnership. It also can give an associate exposure to different clients, which can in turn expand the associate's network and foster the development of important client relationships that could lead to new business.

Smith: I think many young lawyers (including myself) are hesitant to reach out to partners about getting staffed on cases that they might find interesting. When I started at the firm, it felt unnatural to reach out to partners and express interest in certain cases, especially if those partners were located in other offices. My own

hesitation in doing that caused me to miss out on some great cases and opportunities. I now really appreciate when younger lawyers reach out to express interest in a particular case or area of law, and even if there isn't an immediate opportunity to staff them, they will certainly be top of mind for future opportunities.

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?

Smith: I was in a serious accident about a year after joining the firm, which required me to miss over a year of work during my recovery. Obviously missing over a year of practice as a fourth year was not part of my "plan," but I learned several important lessons as a result. During my recovery, I had a chance to really evaluate what was important to me, and realized that at BSF, I had a unique opportunity to do really meaningful and impactful legal work. That realization was an incredible motivator not only in my recovery, but also in making up for the time I lost once I was cleared to return to work. Overall, I think my accident has caused me to approach my work with a renewed passion and empathy, which, without a doubt, has made me a better lawyer.

Goldman: My challenges were more focused on the practice of law itself and similar to what Jenna referred to earlier. As an attorney working at a litigation firm, I did not appreciate that it could still be difficult to get stand-up court experience as well as develop my deposition skills. Sometimes those opportunities

presented themselves because you are working on a large case with 40 depositions, for instance. However, my cases never panned out like that. I had to seek opportunities and advocate for myself to be able to obtain them.

For example, while on maternity leave with my daughter, who is now 3.5 years old, I got in touch with a partner who then staffed me on a trial that took place a few months after I returned to work. I then continued to work with that partner more and ultimately took and defended depositions. I also sought pro bono work and had a case where I was able to argue a motion to dismiss in federal court. Through those experiences, I gained not only skills but additional advocates who supported me for partnership.

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

Goldman: Some of the best advice I was given that has always stuck with me is that your career is not linear. As long as you are learning something or enjoying the work, you are on the "right path." This is hard to see when you are a law student. For some, the path will be starting as an associate at a law firm and making partner. For others, it will be a more winding road across different organizations, but all paths can be equally rewarding.

I think this is extra important to consider as a woman in the legal industry, especially if you want to have children. Being pregnant while practicing law is challenging because of the physical and emotional toll of pregnancy. And

then going back to practice after you have a child is new territory as you balance your old work-life self with your new home-life self. Give yourself some time to adjust and adapt and know that you are still on the “right path” without comparing yourself to everyone around you.

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

Goldman: I have found texting to be integral to my business development approach. Many people find it easier to read and respond to a text message in comparison to an email or having formal meetings. While the latter are still critical to business development, texting has allowed me to maintain more contacts and reach out more frequently to existing and potential clients. Similarly, having a social media presence has allowed me to network seamlessly with hundreds of contacts I likely would have lost touch with a decade ago.

In fact, my social media outreach and the connections I had maintained through technology played a huge role in our ability to obtain the signatures of over 500 female athletes, as well organizations such as the Women’s National Basketball Players’ Association, for our amicus brief to the U.S. Supreme Court in the Dobbs case.

How would you describe your work mindset?

Smith: I made partner while I was pregnant, and this is a question I’ve spent a lot of time

thinking about during my parental leave. Prior to becoming a mom, I had very few restrictions on when I could work. This type of flexibility allowed me to really dig into emergent projects on very little notice. I know that when I return to work, I will have to adjust that mindset to a certain extent, but I think the nature of our work will always require a certain degree of flexibility. One of the things I love about complex civil litigation is the ability to really dig into an issue and produce thoughtful, compelling results. I appreciate that the firm culture gives attorneys as much flexibility as possible to achieve that, while also showing support for the exciting life changes attorneys go through, like a pregnancy.

Goldman: Similarly, I also made partner while I was pregnant. And now that I have two young children, I try to seize every moment in both my personal and professional life. This has made me a more productive and efficient lawyer, as well as a more present and energized mom.

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.

Smith: I’m a member of the firm’s diversity, equity and inclusion committee as well as the retention and recruitment subcommittee, both of which are committed to attracting, developing, and retaining diverse talent. I’m also the pro bono coordinator for the Albany office.