

How I Made Partner: 'Trust Yourself and Trust Your Gut,' Says Kamil Shields of Sullivan & Cromwell

"If you want to be a partner, you need to own it. Be prepared to do the work and do it well. Be prepared to be diligent, thoughtful, detailed and persuasive—and love every minute of it."

By Tasha Norman

Kamil R. Shields, Sullivan & Cromwell, Washington, D.C.

Practice area: Litigation.

Law School Year and Graduation: I graduated from Yale Law School in 2006.

How long have you been at the firm? I joined Sullivan & Cromwell in 2012 and left in 2014 to go to the U.S. Attorney's Office in D.C. I returned to the firm as a special counsel in 2019. In total, I have been with S&C for approximately 4.5 years.

How long were you an associate at the firm? I was an associate at S&C for approximately two years before becoming an assistant United States attorney—a dream of mine since I was a law clerk. After serving as an AUSA for five years, I returned to S&C.

Were you an associate at another firm before joining your present firm? I was an associate at another firm immediately prior to joining S&C in 2012. S&C rarely brings on lateral associates, so I consider myself quite lucky. Upon joining the Firm, I felt like I had finally found my "fit." The partners here immediately involved me in work that I found challenging and

sophisticated, and I identified mentors that supported me personally and professionally and encouraged my development as a lawyer.

What year did you make partner at your current firm? I became a partner on July 1, 2021.

What's the biggest surprise you experienced in becoming partner? Prior to making partner, I would have said that, once elected, I would finally feel satisfied. You focus for so long on the path to partnership that you think once completed, you will feel "done." Instead, I have been surprised at how much I continue to think about the future: What do I want in connection with this role; what will be the unique perspective that I bring to my clients; what is the next set of skills that I should obtain to be the type of lawyer, thought leader and counselor that I want to be?

What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in making you partner? I worked to show the partners that I wanted to be part of the community that makes S&C such an outstanding place. Indeed, one of the things that I really like about S&C



courtesy photo

Kamil R. Shields

is that there isn't one case or one personality type that destines you for success. If you are committed to doing the work—and doing it well—you will succeed here.

Describe how you feel now about your career now that you've made partner. Partnership means that I have made it past one hurdle, but there are still many to go. As a prosecutor, the first time you obtain a just conviction, you feel proud that your effort and dedication has been recognized, but you don't stop. With each trial, you become a bit more confident in your

skills but you never rest on your laurels. During my time as an AUSA, I encountered great trial lawyers—lawyers who told me that they were continuously working on how best to engage the jury, conduct effective direct and cross-examinations and distill their case into a winning closing argument. I think of that advice as I embark on the next chapter of my career.

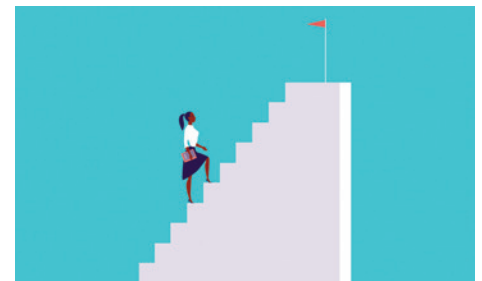
What advice would you give to an associate who wants to make partner? Make it happen! If you want to be a partner, you need to own it. Be prepared to do the work and do it well. Be prepared to be diligent, thoughtful, detailed and persuasive—and love every minute of it. Be prepared to tell people what you want and then to achieve it. I would tell any associate considering partnership that if you want it, you can do it.

What's the key to successful business development in your opinion, and how do you grow professionally? In my view, the key to successful business development is problem-solving. Clients want to be able to trust that their lawyer has sufficiently considered the problem for which they need advice, including the consequences of that advice. S&C taught me that, at its core, business development is predicated on being a true “counselor.” Meaning that you need to dig in to the problem and consider it from multiple perspectives, depending on the type of litigation—your client’s perspective, the government’s perspective, the regulator’s perspective and, in some cases, your adversary’s perspective—in order

to sufficiently “counsel” your client about the wisest and best resolution to that problem. Although it has been a bit more difficult to have face-to-face discussions with our clients, I don’t think it has stymied my approach to, or engagement with, my matters. I still look forward to tackling my clients’ toughest problems, addressing bet-the-company issues and growing our relationship, even if I have to do it by Zoom rather than in-person!

Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to partner? I have been incredibly lucky to have had many mentors throughout my legal career. Both of the judges for whom I clerked—Hon. Richard Roberts of the U.S. District Court in the District of Columbia and Hon. Barrington Parker of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit—have provided invaluable advice and support at every step. I also could name scores of people at S&C who have encouraged me and to whom I am grateful for my success. But there are four litigation partners in particular that have had an outsized impact on my career at the firm: **David Rein, Tracy Richelle High, Sharon Cohen Levin** and **Bob Giuffra**.

As an associate, I worked extensively with David and Tracy. David gave me my first opportunity to lead a deposition, and then he kept giving me those opportunities. He taught me discipline. Tracy has never wavered in her encouragement, pushing me to excel at every challenge presented. She taught me poise. Upon returning



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to the firm, I worked on multiple matters with Sharon, the “Babe Ruth of asset forfeiture” and one of the most well-respected and beloved former prosecutors I know. She taught me the craft. Finally, Bob, the firm’s vice-chair and one of the most accomplished lawyers in the profession, has consistently served as a sponsor for me. Bob is unbelievably good at being that trusted adviser and confidante—he is a master-class in problem-solving. He taught me leadership.

What challenges did you face, or did you have to overcome in your career path, and what was the lesson learned? The biggest challenge for me was overcoming my inclination as a young lawyer to question my decisions and learn to be more resolute. While I think that it is incredibly important to be thoughtful in the decision-making process and considerate of other viewpoints—particularly for people that hold significant positions of power, as I once did as a prosecutor—sometimes you just have to trust yourself and trust your gut! In trial, juries pick up on your expressions and body cues as well as your words. Once you have put in the work to support a conclusion, project it with confidence. That lesson stays with me.