

How I Made Partner: "I Found Synergies With My Colleagues and Created Opportunities for Our Collective Success," Says Renee Zaytsev of Thompson Hine

"Don't be complacent. I spent way too long in the status quo because it was easy, not because it made me happy. Continuing to do something just because it's comfortable will rarely get you where you want to go—or will just make you miserable when you get there."

By Tasha Norman

Renee Zaytsev, 39, Thompson Hine, New York.

Practice area: Business Litigation/Co-Chair of Securities & Shareholder Litigation.

Law school and year of graduation: Georgetown University Law Center, 2007.

How long have you been at the firm? A little over two years.

How long were you an associate at the firm? I joined the firm as senior counsel in September 2019 and was put up for partner about a year later. In late 2020, effective as of Jan. 1, 2021.

Were you an associate at another firm before joining your present firm? I began my career at a midsize New York firm and stayed for about 11 years. I made partner there in 2019 and left later that year to join Thompson Hine.

What's the biggest surprise you experienced in becoming partner? I made partner twice, at two different law firms, and the biggest surprise

has been how "partnership" can mean something entirely different depending on the firm. When I joined Thompson Hine, I was very pleasantly surprised to be treated like an owner.

What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in making you partner? I'm an unabashedly ambitious person, but I don't have sharp elbows, and I don't see success as a zero-sum game. When I joined the firm, I looked for and found synergies with my colleagues and created opportunities for our collective success. Thompson Hine takes a lot of pride in its collaborative culture, so I think that approach really struck a chord.

Describe how you feel now about your career now that you've made partner. Partnership is often seen as the goal but it's really just the beginning. There's still so much more I want to accomplish in my career, and this is just one step in the journey, albeit a very important one.



(Courtesy photo)

Renee Zaytsev

What's the key to successful business development in your opinion? For a long time, I disliked business development because I thought it necessarily entailed forced or "salesy" interactions, which made me uncomfortable. Over time, I just did what felt right for me, which is forging personal connections. At the end of the day, we mostly want to work with people we like and

trust, and clients are no exception. With remote work, I've had to be a little bit gutsier when it comes to making new connections, but it's also created new opportunities and made it easier to stay in touch. Overall, my experience has been that people still welcome authentic interaction, perhaps even more so than before.

Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to partner? Without a doubt, my family. The birth of my daughter in 2017 led not only to a newfound purpose at home but also to a sort of renaissance professionally. I was no longer okay just doing a job and started taking steps to develop a career. I also owe credit to my husband, who works for himself and was able to step up with the child care responsibilities, which in turn allowed me to focus on growing my brand and my business. And I would be remiss if I didn't give a special mention to my former colleague Ellen Holloman, now a partner at Cadwalader, who believed in me every step of the way and has been an incredible role model.

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

- First and foremost, develop your skills and become an excellent attorney.
- Second, your network will be key to your future business development potential, so build your network now—both externally and within the firm—and allow it to grow organically.
- Third, while billable work is important, there are many other ways to add value, including writing articles, developing useful expertise and contributing to the firm culture.

What challenges did you face or had to overcome in your career path, and what was the lesson learned?

Earlier in my career, I had to deal with a more senior partner who claimed to support my career advancement but repeatedly took steps to make sure I didn't outshine her. The experience taught me the importance of finding—and being—an authentic mentor and sponsor. I am committed to using my position, network and experience to lift up others, especially women and minorities, in any way that I can.

Knowing what you know now about your career path, what advice would you give to your younger self. Don't be complacent. I spent way too long in the status quo because it



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was easy, not because it made me happy. Continuing to do something just because it's comfortable will rarely get you where you want to go—or will just make you miserable when you get there.

What lessons, if any, did you learn in 2020/2021 (the years of COVID-19). The importance of adaptability. COVID hit six months after I joined a new firm, throwing a major wrench in my business development plans. Rather than hit pause, I found creative ways to make and maintain connections with both clients and colleagues. It sounds crazy, but these have actually been the best years I've had professionally. I recognize, however, that many people, especially women, have not been as fortunate. It's equally important to adapt to other people's circumstances and not assume that everyone's experience is like yours.