

## How I Made Partner: 'You Are In Control of Shaping Your Experiences,' Says Cooley's Sascha Grimm

**"I am passionate about diversity and inclusion and am proud to be at a firm that constantly challenges itself to do and be better. I feel like I am able to help in that effort using my voice as a partner in the firm."**

By Tasha Norman

**Sascha Grimm, 37, Cooley**

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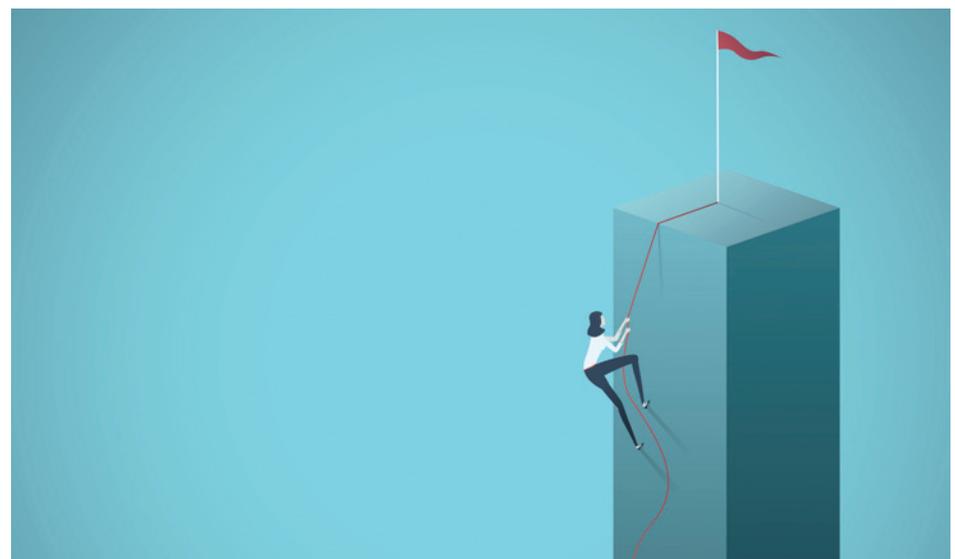
**Practice area:** Commercial litigation.

**Law school and year of graduation:** I did my undergraduate degree at the University of Cambridge, graduating in 2005. I then went to BPP Law School between 2005 to 2007. In the U.K., you are generally required to spend two years at a law firm doing a training contract as a "trainee solicitor" before you can qualify as an attorney and become an associate. I started my training contract at a law firm called Kendall Freeman in 2007 and qualified as a lawyer in 2009.

**How long have you been at the firm?** Since Jan. 1 2015, when Cooley opened an office in London.

**How long were you an associate at the firm?** I was an associate for four years at Cooley.

**Were you an associate at another firm before joining your present firm?** I started at a London firm called Kendall Freeman in 2007, which



then merged with a U.S. firm called Edwards Angell Palmer & Dodge in 2008. That firm then merged with another firm to become Edwards Wildman, which is where I practiced as an associate until the move to Cooley in 2015. A number of my colleagues from Edwards Wildman also moved to Cooley so I have worked with many of the same people for my entire career. I made partner in my ninth year.

**What year did you make partner at your current firm?** Jan. 1, 2019.

**What's the biggest surprise you experienced in becoming partner?**

The first thing that struck me was how much of a genuine bond there is between the partners at Cooley across the firm—it feels like a true partnership with everyone pulling in the same direction. Shortly after making partner, I attended my first partners' meeting in the U.S. and was just bowled over by the supportive atmosphere and the fact that I was immediately welcomed in. One of Cooley's strengths as a firm is collaboration and an energetic



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commitment to our firm's culture, and I saw and felt that first-hand right from the outset.

Interestingly, although I was totally thrilled at making partner, I was surprised to find myself experiencing a bit of imposter syndrome in the first few months. It felt like I had spent so many years wanting to make partner and convincing people that I was ready—and then when it happened, I suddenly wondered if I was ready for the responsibilities of partnership and whether I would be good at it! I mentioned this feeling to a few more senior partners at the time, who confided that they had also felt the same, which I found reassuring. After a couple of months, the feeling passed—I think it is normal when taking on a new responsibility and it can be harnessed in a positive way.

**What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in making you partner?** I imagine it is a combination of all of the above—and probably based on people's experience of working with

me over a number of years. I do think it takes years to build up a reputation before making partner. By the time you get into the partnership process, I think it is assumed that you are a good lawyer. The deciding factors are the other things you can bring to the table, whether that is growth in a strategically important practice area, or leadership in a specific field. I would hope I made partner because the firm saw me as someone who would contribute positively to the firm's success, and as someone who would uphold Cooley's values. I do also think there is an element of the stars aligning, which can sometimes help. In my case, my practice had been busy and was growing in strategically important areas to the firm. The London office had been open for almost four years and was doing well—I was in the first round of associates that were made up in London since the office opened. There was a real sense of excitement and pride in the office that this was a mark of how far we had come.

**Describe how you feel now about your career now that you've made partner.** I have never been happier in my career; I absolutely love being a partner at Cooley and I genuinely enjoy the work I do and working with my colleagues. As a commercial litigator, I get to work with a range of really interesting clients, get to know their business inside out, and assist them in highly strategic and critical situations. I am also incredibly grateful to be a partner at such a dynamic firm—I am passionate about

diversity and inclusion and am proud to be at a firm that constantly challenges itself to do and be better. I feel like I am able to help in that effort using my voice as a partner in the firm.

**What's the key to successful business development in your opinion?** Making new clients can be challenging for litigators, because unless someone is already in a dispute, we are usually offering a service for a hypothetical. For that reason, ideally, you will already have a relationship with the client so you are the person they call when an issue arises. It's a cliché, but I do think successful business development comes down to building relationships of trust so that you start working in partnership with your clients, rather than simply being an external resource. I also think that to be a really good lawyer you need to understand your client's unique culture and how it will respond in different situations—so that it almost becomes instinctive. It is only once you really get under the skin of an organization, understand exactly what it does, and what its drivers are, that you become invaluable.

**What's been the biggest change, day to day, in your routine since becoming partner?** I find that I have a lot more meetings in the diaries—and more administration, of course. There is also a more gradual change over the first year probably in terms of how associates and other partners treat you. At first, it can feel a bit strange, especially at the start when you probably feel more aligned with the associates

in the firm—but the transition happens naturally and quite quickly. I do feel a real responsibility for associates as a partner. As we deal with everyone working remotely and being in lockdown due to COVID, I try to make a real effort to spend more time reaching out to associates to catch up with them and make sure they are doing OK, as there aren't the same opportunities as there are when everyone is working in the office together.

In August last year, I became co-chair of the Cooley Women's Initiative. So now a lot of my time is spent working with the Women's Initiative Committee and the Cooley Diversity, Equity and Inclusion team on strategies and initiatives to increase the retention, recruitment and promotion of talented women and diverse attorneys in the firm. I really enjoy this role and working with a great committee with so many ideas.

**Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to partner?** Rather like it takes a village to raise a child, I feel like it takes a whole firm to make a partner! There are so many people who have helped me along the way in my career—some probably more than they realized. Sometimes people can have a small cameo role but leave a huge impact.

In terms of the people who have helped me most consistently, it is really the partners I grew up with as an associate who have helped propel me

to partnership. Although they have all helped me directly as mentors, I suspect they were also all instrumental in conversations behind the scenes that I was not privy to in terms of supporting my nomination to the partnership! I worked closely with James Maton, a partner at Cooley, on a matter in the few years before entering the partnership process and he was great at giving me advice and the opportunities I needed to build my experience and practice at that critical time. Another Cooley partner, Laurence Harris, has been a source of good advice over the years; I have worked closely with him since I was a junior lawyer, so have learned a lot from him about how to approach and run cases strategically. Kevin Perry is a litigation partner at Cooley whom I have also known since the beginning of my career—although we sometimes approach issues from different angles, I have often sought out and very much value his advice, probably even more so now I am a partner! Last but not least, I need to give a shout out to Henry Stewart, who made partner in the same year as me; we first started working together at my previous firm in 2008 and have been good friends ever since. I very much appreciated having a buddy go through the partnership process at the same time as me, who understood what it was like!

**What's the best piece of advice you could give an associate who**

**wants to make partner?** I think first off, take ownership of your career and where you want to be. I think it is quite powerful to realize that you are in control of shaping your experiences, rather than just letting them happen to you. Identify areas that you need to develop and reach out and ask people if they can advise or help you—be entrepreneurial in building your career. In my experience, provided you can show you have a plan or have thought about things, people are usually very receptive to giving guidance and help if asked.

The other thing I would say is to remember that being a partner is much more than simply the billable hours. It is about managing and caring about the people you work with and trying to create the best working environment you can to get the most out of people. To that end, I would say you should think about what you bring to the working environment and, if you identify things that need to change, what you can do to bring that about. You don't need to wait to be a partner to do that—and it could be something that your firm really values!



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