

How I Made Partner: 'Be Proactive and Take Ownership of Your Cases,' Advises Susman Godfrey's Mark Musico

"Before inviting you to join the partnership, the firm will want to know that you are not just someone who can get a task done when asked, but also someone who can think ahead and anticipate what's coming down the road."

By Tasha Norman

Mark Musico, 35, Susman Godfrey

Office: New York

Practice area: High-stakes commercial litigation

Law school and year of graduation: Columbia Law School, 2011

How long have you been at the firm? I joined the firm in 2013, but left in 2014 to clerk for Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and have been back at the firm since 2015. In my year at the firm before I left to clerk for RBG, I was lucky enough to go to trial with impossibly talented SG lawyers from around the country. Even though I was the least senior lawyer on the team, the senior partners went to bat for me to make sure I got stand-up opportunities and the chance to present a witness at trial. It was no special favor, just the SG way. There was no question in my mind at that point that I'd be coming back. Well, here I am!

How long were you an associate at the firm? Five years

Were you an associate at another firm before joining your present firm? No

What year did you make partner at your current firm? 2019

What's the biggest surprise you experienced in becoming a partner? How much goes on behind the scenes to foster professional growth and camaraderie at the firm, especially in a year like this one. For my part, I've tried to take the time to call associates just to check in to see how they are doing, ask what we can be doing better, and thank them for all they're doing for our firm and for our clients even in these trying times.

What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in making you a partner? If I had to pick one especially important moment, it was trying a case with our beloved founder and legal legend, Steve Susman. After trial, Steve sent an email telling all the partners to "ask for Mark" if they ever needed a lawyer to join them at



Mark Musico. Courtesy photo

trial (and that was before we knew we had won a victory worth about \$58 million for our client). Needless to say, it was a good day for my partnership prospects, and easily one of the proudest moments of my career. But, really, it's hard to imagine there was one "deciding point." After seeing my work and trying cases with me, the partnership trusted that I could deliver what clients come to

SG to get: the good judgment, hard work, and creative thinking that it takes to find the “win” at trial.

Describe how you feel about your career now that you’ve made partner.

I’m humbled, and thrilled! In particular, I love that I get to put skin in the game. SG has been and continues to be a pioneer in alternative fee arrangements. As an associate, I was pleased that our firm had the good sense to work out whatever sort of fee deal best suited our clients’ interests. Now, as a partner, I really get to align my clients’ success with my own.

What’s the key to successful business development in your opinion?

This is a new part of the job for me, but I always try to live by RBG’s advice to “disagree without being disagreeable.” Opposing counsel one day might be co-counsel or referring counsel the next; we’re often brought in at the eleventh hour to take over a case at trial, and more often than not, it’s another law firm recommending us to the client. Folks will remember that you did good work and, just as importantly, they will remember that you were a good person.

What’s been the biggest change, day-to-day, in your routine since becoming a partner? I want my existing clients to know I’m keeping up on areas of law that matter to them, from issues affecting the finance industry, to intellectual property, to First Amendment



Photo: Shutterstock

and media issues, to antitrust, and to the foundational procedure issues that affect every case. And I keep my ear to the ground for promising new cases or areas of law for our firm. So, I dedicate part of every day to reading fine outlets for legal news like Law.com.

Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to a partner? I owe a great debt of gratitude to so many talented lawyers who have served as mentors and role models, but the people who really “helped propel” me to partner? Family and friends. Law firm life is fast-paced and exciting, but can also be taxing and exhausting. I could not have found success at SG without their unflinching support and encouragement.

What’s the best piece of advice you could give an associate who wants to make partner?

Be proactive, and take ownership of your cases. Before inviting you to join the partnership, the firm will want to know that you are not just someone who can get a task done when asked, but also someone who can think ahead and anticipate what’s coming down the road. And they will want to see that you are invested in your clients’ success and the future success of the firm.



Check out more career advancement advice and insights on ALM’s Professionals Network on LinkedIn. We are excited about this pivotal group.