

How I Made Partner: 'Do Good Work, and Don't Be a Jerk!' says Susman Godfrey's Abby Noebels

"Think strategically about how to move the case forward to achieve the wins your client is looking for."

By Tasha Norman

Abby Noebels, 34, Susman Godfrey

Office: Houston

Practice area: Trial attorney, commercial and business disputes

Law school and year of graduation: The University of Chicago Law School, 2012

How long have you been at the firm? Seven years

How long were you an associate at the firm? Six 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 partner? Thankfully, there have not been too many surprises. Susman Godfrey has a radically transparent partnership, so for years as an associate, I also had a relatively comprehensive understanding of the firm's finances, business model and partnership expectations.

What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in making you

partner? Our firm is made up of career trial lawyers who love nothing better than to be in court, and it is infectious. I was hooked after my first trial, and I tried my best to get back into the courtroom as soon as possible. You have to have that kind of energy to enjoy the practice at Susman Godfrey and be successful, and I think that the firm's leadership recognized that drive and ability to step up in me.

What would you tell your younger self? *You're most likely your hardest critic – let that motivate you, but don't let it hold you back.*

Describe how you feel now about your career now that you've made partner. I took a deep breath and dove right back into the fray! There isn't anywhere better to practice as a trial lawyer than Susman Godfrey, and I am so happy that I get to try cases with some of my closest friends for years to come.

What's the key to successful business development in your opinion? Do good work, and don't be a jerk! I always try to have respectful and friendly relationships with my opposing



Abby Noebels, Courtesy Photo

counsel. I know that many of those relationships will pay off in the future—through referrals or as co-counsel on either side of the docket.

What's been the biggest change, day-to-day, in your routine since becoming partner? About two months after being elected as a partner, I welcomed my first child, a baby girl. I'm a much earlier riser now. And while that happy disruption was expected, returning to a fully virtual working environment was not. My routine has turned on its head! I truly miss seeing my colleagues in person on a daily basis, sharing ideas and anecdotes about

our work. I also miss in-person depositions and hearings.

As it relates to my role in the firm, this year I was appointed to lead the firm's employment committee where I spearhead recruitment efforts of law students for our summer program. I also seek exceptional candidates to join us after they finish their federal judicial clerkships. This is time-consuming, but a special opportunity to help bring in talented lawyers who will hopefully be our colleagues for years to come.

Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to partner? I have had countless mentors at the firm who have advised me, sought out the right projects for me, and raised the bar for me to challenge and improve myself as a lawyer. My colleague and Susman Godfrey Houston partner Geoffrey Harrison has made the biggest impact on my approach. Geoffrey brilliantly demonstrates the Susman Godfrey ethos that this work is fun, and all the more so when you win. I was just months into my first year of practice when we went to trial defending a multimillion-dollar oil and gas offshore dispute. Geoffrey was insistent that I should have a stand-up role, and our fantastic client had faith enough to let me take three witnesses on direct and cross-examination. There was no sweeter feeling than the jury's 15-minute deliberation before they came back and delivered our complete, \$0 no-liability, defense verdict. It was so great that, two years later in the same courthouse, our trial

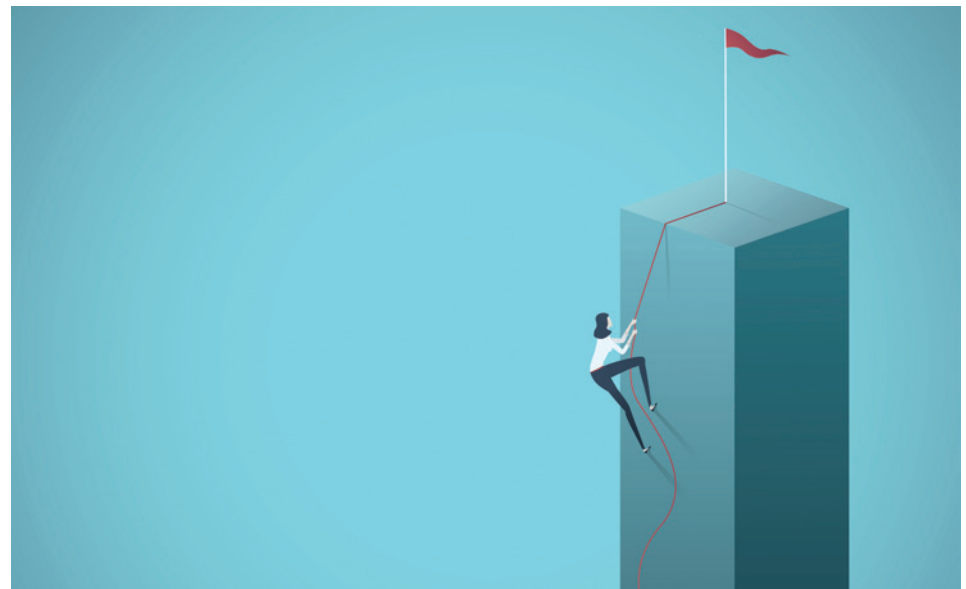


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team delivered a \$48 million plaintiff's verdict for the same client. Again, Geoffrey insisted that every member of the team have an important stand-up role at trial. A great mentor gives you support and opportunities, and also important criticism when you need to hear it. There is also the rare quality of sponsorship—advocating for your work to others in your organization. I'm grateful that Geoffrey took on both roles for me as a young associate.

What's the best piece of advice you could give an associate who wants to make partner? Your partners hired you with the idea that you will constantly be improving yourself. While they know you can spot every issue, they hired you because they want you to learn to exercise your own judgment to solve those issues. Show them you can fix the problems instead of just identifying them, and that you can think strategically about how to move the case forward to achieve the wins your client is looking for.

How would you advise an associate to network at a time like this? Put yourself on your partners' calendar—everyone is busy balancing work and life, but I'm personally always happier on a day when I take a pause to connect with one of my colleagues just to catch up. If you can, seek out new bar groups in your city and attend some of their virtual "networking" events. I have been impressed at all of the virtual programming that Houston bar associations and other organizations have been able to coordinate this year. As a result, I've had the opportunity for a number of one-on-one conversations with judges and other lawyers, which has been particularly useful as we all exchange information about virtual hearings and depositions, and socially distanced jury trials.



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We are excited about this pivotal group.