

How I Made Practice Group Chair: 'Focus on Associate Development, Mentoring, Partner Coordination and Growth,' Says Kimberly deBeers of Skadden

By Tasha Norman

April 22, 2022

Kimberly A. deBeers, 53, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom, Chicago.

Job Title: Partner and head of the M&A/corporate group in Skadden's Chicago office.

Practice Area: Corporate: M&A; private equity; capital markets.

Law school and year of graduation: DePaul University College of Law, 1995.

How long have you been at the firm? I have practiced law at Skadden for more than 26 years.

What year were you promoted to your current role? I became head of the Chicago office's M&A/corporate group in 2020 after 16 years as a partner.

Were you a partner at another firm before joining your present firm? I have spent my entire law firm legal career at Skadden. I joined the firm as a summer associate in 1994, left in 1998 to join an acquisition development team at a startup, then returned to Skadden later that year as an associate in the corporate practice. While at the startup, which focused on acquiring luxury brand hotels, I learned valuable lessons that have served me well in my career at Skadden, including the importance of thinking about what the client needs at its organization and how the legal work product could more seamlessly support the business product.

What do you think was the deciding point for the firm to appoint you to your current role? I was selected

for the corporate practice leader role in large part due to my focus on associate development and mentoring, partner coordination and growth in both business development opportunities and the partner promotion pipeline. I have prioritized mentoring and attorney development since



Courtesy photo

Kim deBeers.

becoming a senior associate and continued to increase my involvement in those activities after becoming a partner. I am passionate about growing and developing our talent pool, supporting our strong firm culture and helping our attorneys carve their career paths. A big part of these efforts is encouraging our junior attorneys to learn business development skills early in their careers through participation in thought leadership and investment in client relationships from day one.

What's the key to successful business development, in your opinion? Always exceed your clients' expectations and never assume that, once clients retain you, they will stick with you – it is your job to continue to prove your value. In addition, a successful attorney seeks to understand her clients' business goals and is always working to find strategies and alternatives to support those goals in ways that clients

may not be aware of or know how to effectuate. Being willing to put in the time to find a creative solution to a difficult problem is how you build lasting and trusting relationships with your clients. I am fortunate to have a stellar team of colleagues at Skadden who work together seamlessly across practices to address our clients' most-complex issues.

Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to your current role? Allison Schneirov, the head of Skadden's New York M&A/Corporate Group, influenced me by illustrating a successful lawyer's path in a large corporate firm, showing impeccable judgment on tough issues and mentoring and encouraging me as I grew my practice.

In addition, Peter Krupp, now a retired partner, was a key mentor and supporter in my development as an attorney and journey to becoming partner. Finally, Brian Duwe (a partner and the leader of the Chicago office) facilitated opportunities for me to develop leadership skills and helped me understand the role of a practice group leader. Brian taught me some of the key priorities in managing both attorneys and professional staff on a large scale, particularly carving out time to be available and support folks on both a professional and personal level. This has been critical during the COVID-19 pandemic. I often consulted with Brian on ways to offer support and to keep the group, especially junior attorneys, connected.

Allison, Brian and Peter have instilled the importance of mentoring and supporting junior attorneys to position themselves for opportunities that will further their career goals. My mentors were a significant part of my success and helped me seek opportunities. I prioritize offering that same support to junior attorneys, both in my practice group and outside of the group.

What's the best advice you could give to a partner interested in leading a practice group? *Recognize that leading a practice can be challenging work that requires a different set of skills than those necessary to practice law. Leading a group is rewarding and interesting, but*

you ultimately have the role of ensuring that various management tasks are completed. Accordingly, when you are given administrative or development tasks as a young partner, showcase yourself as someone who takes those responsibilities seriously and completes them on time. Demonstrating a commitment to mentoring and attorney development is also critical when selecting practice group leaders.

Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give to yourself? Although I am happy with and feel fortunate for the path my career has taken, if I were to look back and give myself advice, I would tell myself to be more aggressive in seeking management responsibilities earlier in my career. I frequently convey this to junior attorneys and encourage them to pursue management opportunities as early as possible, as guiding people and systems is a skill developed and refined over the course of many years.

What statement would you use to describe your work mindset? Deliver excellence in every aspect of your role, whether that's providing legal services to your clients or handling internal management responsibilities. I aim to be prepared and focused on whatever legal issues or administrative matter I'm facilitating.

Please mention the initiatives you are working on and the impact you hope to achieve. I recently was appointed to my first three-year term on the Policy Committee, which serves as Skadden's board of directors. In this role, I hope to provide measured and considered input and oversight as we work to guide the firm in strategic initiatives and yearly operations. In addition, I serve on the Chicago Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee and on the Chicago office's hiring committee. In these roles, I hope to lend my leadership and management skills to further develop the programs and goals of these important committees, including nurturing and developing talent and building strong, diverse, innovative and welcoming teams.