

How I Made Practice Group Co-Chair: 'Gaining the Trust of Your Colleagues Is the Most Important Characteristic to Lead a Practice Group,' Says Monica Arora of Proskauer

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How long have you been at the firm?

This month it will be six years.

What year were you promoted to your current role?

I joined the firm as a partner in 2016 and was named co-head of the Private Funds Group in 2020.

Were you a partner at another firm before joining your present firm?

I was a partner at another firm for seven years prior to joining Proskauer. Proskauer gave me a new set of opportunities at a different scale specifically related to my practice area.

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

By the time I was appointed to my current role, I had been at Proskauer for several years and had worked closely with firm leadership throughout the organization. Perhaps most importantly, I was appointed to the role during the height of COVID. It was an unprecedented time—increased client demands and competitive challenges, while defending against the loss of talent and the maintenance of culture. I knew that I had the unique skill set needed to address those challenges, and the firm recognized that. We deliberately steered into this time of great tumult within law firms—record number of resignations, low morale and pervasive burnout—by spending meaningful time with talent at all levels. From newly graduated legal assistants to fellow partners, I helped to arrange regular one-on-one meetings, consistent team communication and as many in-person social events as we could manage! This purposeful and genuine engagement proved to be particularly effective in building and preserving a high quality culture where people feel valued. I am incredibly proud that during my tenure the Private Funds Group has grown to its largest size in history and we are excited for what lies ahead!

I have found that developing genuine relationships is instrumental to building the credibility to be able to 'walk in the shoes' of your client.

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

For me, it is really important to identify ways to connect with both clients and colleagues that you respect and can learn from. That's why I have found that developing genuine relationships is instrumental to building the credibility to be able to "walk in the shoes" of your client. My clients know that I will always have their back and leave nothing on the table.

Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to your current role?

My parents undoubtedly had the greatest influence on my career. They were refugees in India as children (relocating from what is now northwest Pakistan) and came to America as adults in 1970 after winning a visa lottery. They came with no family, money or relationships. They worked odd jobs and saved enough money to enroll in masters programs in education, after which they became public school teachers for decades. When I think about the courage and independence they demonstrated in their life that had a deep impact on me, even if I did not know it at the time. I have always prized independence (and I can safely say that this trait has passed down to my two young daughters, who remind me of their independence every day!). As soon as I turned 14, I started applying for jobs. First, I tried the local McDonald's—they didn't call me back! I then was hired at Thom McCann, where I became the top shoe sales- person in the region throughout high school. Years later, when my husband embarked on a political career in the Midwest, I had the tenacity, as a mid- level associate in the mid-2000s (15 years before COVID) to work remotely at a time when very few lawyers did so, let alone non-partners. I succeeded at this because I was able to establish relationships directly with clients where they relied on and trusted me, which I believe contributed greatly to my business success and ultimately a seamless transition to leadership.

What's the best piece of advice you could give to a partner who is interested in leading a practice group?

Gaining the trust of your colleagues is the most important characteristic to lead a practice group. I recall right before taking on the new role, a close colleague pulled me aside and said, "You know, doing this is a lot of work and is not always appreciated." That is undoubtedly true—and I have found that developing the trust of your peers is not automatic – it takes time and energy— and is well worth it when you feel like you are making a difference.

Knowing what you know now, what would you do differently in your early career?

I wish I was more vocal about my views, particularly as a junior lawyer. That took years to overcome. It became easier with experience. There came a time when I looked at the hundreds of deals and clients I had worked with and counseled successfully—whether guiding their exponential growth in AUM, or executing a strategy shift or negotiating a succession of leadership—and realized that I had formed very strong judgment in this field and relying on it would lead me to success!

What three terms would you use to describe your work mindset?

- Listen closely to your clients and what they tell you that they
- There is always a solution even when it is not
- Try not to take yourself too

What firm or office initiatives are you working on?

I am proud to be a member of Proskauer's Women's Sponsorship Program which supports the career development and professional growth of mid and senior-level women lawyers through senior partners who serve as their sponsors. I am also a member of the firm's Diversity Task Force, where I helped to establish a Pipeline Program to support the promotion of diverse attorneys. In addition, I am a member of each of the Promotions, Development and Hiring Committees of the firm. You do need to be "at the table" to make an impact. I have seen this firsthand serving on these various firm committees, where I have been able to advocate and support lawyers at the firm while also exert influence. This has helped lead to a marked increase in the hiring and promotion of diverse lawyers. And, in other instances, it has helped progress people's professional development outside of the firm. Just recently, one of my closest mentees was offered a tremendous in-house opportunity. I was able to give her realistic counsel on her opportunities and path within the firm to arm her with the intelligence needed to make the critical decision to take the in-house opportunity. She is thriving in her new role. Even though there is much more to do, it is incredibly gratifying to feel like you can actually make a difference in people's lives. I hope that my input and active engagement in each of these initiatives will help advance the profession by nurturing and developing the next generations from a diverse pool of talent.

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