Proskauer

Alumni Reflections: Trading Places with Steve Burwell and Lily Desmond

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The careers of partner **Steve Burwell** and Proskauer alumna **Lily Desmond**, associate general counsel, corporate and securities at Resilience, have repeatedly crisscrossed. Though they've spent little time working together, first at Deutsche Bank and then with Lily leaving Proskauer to move in-house just as Steve joined the Firm, they've nevertheless had a substantial impact on each other and built a strong relationship that continues to grow.

When Paths First Cross

Steve: Lily, remind me how we first met.

Lily: It was 2017. I was on maternity leave from Proskauer with my first child when I was told of an opportunity to be seconded to Deutsche Bank. I was excited because I had worked with investment banks for years and hadn't had the opportunity to be in-house. From day one, I was so glad I decided to go. As I met the team, I realized, Steve, that you had grown this amazing culture at Deutsche Bank. The team was approachable and collaborative, and it was not this big, intimidating team that one might have expected at a large investment bank. I was there for six months before returning to Proskauer.

Steve: We did have fun. And even though we only worked together for six months, I think we ended up influencing each other in significant ways.

Lily: Absolutely. I think one thing I noticed about you almost immediately is that you're very commercial and always tried to be solution oriented. That way, whenever you had to hold the line on something with the business team, you were not questioned. That influence has been huge in my current position in-house; we do our best to not be the "no" department. When we can help, we do. I think that is one of the most important foundations for an in-house legal group. You were also never afraid to show that you cared about your team. I think that kept people there for a long time and made it a fun place to work. I've definitely taken these lessons with me.

Steve: I think for me, you gave me this insight into Proskauer such that, from the time when I left Deutsche Bank and before I joined the Firm, I always recognized it as a place where you thrived and were happy. I think that made it a much more attractive place for me. And then, when I eventually decided to join Proskauer, I felt like I had a bit of an inside edge that I wouldn't have had somewhere else.

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Lily Desmond, Associate General Counsel, Corporate and Securities, Resilience

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Ships in the Night

Steve: When did our paths cross again? I guess we jump ahead to me joining Proskauer in January 2021. What do you recall about that time?

Lily: January 2021 is right about when I left Proskauer. When an opportunity at Resilience came up through another Proskauer alum, it was a great fit for me, and I jumped at it. I think you were well into the process of joining Proskauer by then. I always knew that you would be a great cultural fit for Proskauer, so I was personally very sad to miss the opportunity to work with you. What did it all feel like when you started at Proskauer?

Steve: I was very excited to come over to Proskauer, and I was also enthusiastic about the prospect of working together again. Once I learned that you were moving, though, I was also excited about your in-house opportunity. But yes, the timing was almost comical. We overlapped for maybe a week.

Lily: Remind me how you decided to start looking at Proskauer. Were you talking to someone at the Firm ahead of time? Were you even looking to go to a firm?

Steve: This wasn't my first firm after Deutsche Bank. I was at another smaller firm and looking to move. We started talking, and it happened quickly from there. It's just funny how these things work out timing-wise.

Lily: And it was COVID.

Steve: That's right! I came to Proskauer in the middle of COVID. All of my meetings were over Zoom. We've talked previously about your leaving Proskauer, but I'm curious, what was that like — departing after such a long time?

Lily: It was hard to leave the people. I'd come to love Proskauer, but it was such an exciting opportunity for me that I had to make the jump. A well-funded, fast-growing startup in biotech adjacent — it checked all the boxes I was interested in when I relocated from New York to Boston. It was a unique opportunity and has proven to be a positive career development move for me. I've become more of a generalist working in so many different areas I hadn't explored, which has been great.

Enjoying New Adventures

Steve: What are some of the different things that you've been able to do in your role at Resilience that you hadn't done at Proskauer?

Lily: Resilience is a pharmaceutical manufacturing company, but one that was founded to try and disrupt the sector by driving innovation and providing better client service.

I work on financing and corporate governance matters, but I've also done work on anything that comes up from employment to investor relations matters.

Steve: What do you like most about your current role?

Lily: Every day is different, and I interact with people from a variety of backgrounds, from scientists to regulatory experts to the commercial team. It's fascinating to see different leadership styles and ways of working across disciplines. Our legal team is fantastic and it's a great home base, but interacting with people from all different backgrounds has been a fun change of pace from law firm life.

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Steve Burwell, Partner, Capital Markets, Proskauer

Steve: How do you feel Proskauer helped prepare you for all these challenges?

Lily: One of the most important qualities I took away from Proskauer was resourcefulness. Even with a novel or thorny issue, there is almost always an angle to start to chip away at it, or some additional information that can be gleaned from the context upon a second read.

Steve: What are some lasting memories from your time here?

Lily: Most of my lasting memories are associated with the people at Proskauer. We all went through so many changes together and worked on some memorable transactions. Some of those most important, early mentors of my career who I met at Proskauer; I still consider my mentors today. Before making any big career decision, I still call them.

Steve: That’s wonderful to hear. Anything else you’d like to share with the Proskauer alumni community?

Lily: There can be a lot of pressure to maintain a broad network when working in law, but focusing on high quality relationships rather than a large quantity of connections has been critical to my career. It’s kind of a cliche, but the brand that you build for yourself at Proskauer can definitely have ripple effects on your future career.