

How I Made Partner: 'Be Responsive. Be Reliable. Be Proactive,' Says Laura Franco of Mintz

By ALM Staff

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Laura Franco, Member (Partner) at Mintz, Levin, Cohn, Ferris, Glovsky and Popeo, San Francisco, California

Practice area: IP, trademark, brand protection

Law school and year of graduation: U.C. Berkeley Law, 1995

The following has been edited for style.

How long have you been at the firm?

Since April 2024

What was your criteria in selecting your current firm?

It was primarily the fact that one of Mintz's expressed goals was to broaden its trademark practice and build a comprehensive brand protection practice. Integrating my practice into that growth and being part of a cohesive group was very attractive to me.

Mintz has a well-known and thriving IP practice. I was impressed by the way the firm is able to navigate both a litigation, as well as a prosecution practice, and the collaboration between the sides. Given Mintz's sophisticated view of the practice area, and that it was willing to put resources behind my practice, I felt like it was an opportunity that could not be missed.

And of course, I can't say enough about the people that I engaged with during my decision-making process—welcoming, encouraging, and friendly.

Were you an associate at another firm before joining your present firm? If so, which one and how long were you there?



Courtesy photo

Laura Franco of Mintz, Levin, Cohn, Ferris, Glovsky and Popeo.

My career path has been non-linear. I've been at a total of six law firms and have had two in-house positions during my career. I also underwent a significant subject matter shift, from securities litigation to intellectual property. I started at a small Wall Street firm in New York doing securities and general commercial litigation. In my fourth year, I had a fascinating research assignment in trademark law, which led me to an IP boutique and the start of my journey as a brand protection specialist.

During the dot-com era I moved back home to California and ultimately made partner at a well-known Los Angeles-based firm in 2006 still doing

litigation. I later went in-house for a few years where I experienced first-hand how our clients think about and use their outside counsel, what is important to in-house counsel in the delivery of legal services, and how to be efficient and effective. I also developed new skills on the transactional side of brand protection. Ultimately, I returned to Big Law in 2013, where I was brought in as of counsel because I didn't bring a book of business. While it took a few years to develop an internal and external client base, I did so and was elevated to partner.

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

In my first partner role, I was a lieutenant to a partner with a substantial book of business. In that role I, not only honed my skills as a litigator, but I also developed significant skills and experience in client management, responsiveness, managing associates, as well as the administrative tasks required to run a thriving practice. By elevating me to partner, the firm was acknowledging that I was integral to maintaining those significant revenue-generating relationships.

My second elevation was also a recognition that I had become a trusted adviser to partners throughout the firm, and that I could generate and keep my own client base. I had developed a reputation for being responsive, pragmatic, and always willing to step in to help, even if it was to find a lawyer more appropriate for the task that I was. That reputation allowed me to build a loyal set of internal and external clients, and the firm wanted to recognize that.

Was it your performance on a specific case? A personality trait? Making connections with the right people?

It was a mix of performance, personality, and a focus on service. It was about the relationships I developed with my internal clients: I was responsive, I made efforts to reach out, I never turned away a request for help, and I always tried to proactively

anticipate the next question, the next steps or the next project. Fortunately, the nature of my practice is that I can work with any firm client—everyone has a brand—so my skill set allowed me to work with partners across all offices and across all practice groups. I was able to make connections outside of my department and become an invaluable adviser to multiple partners throughout the firm. This visibility certainly helped give me a broad base of support when my partnership candidacy came around.

Who had or has the greatest influence in your career and why?

The person who has had the greatest influence on me in my career is a person who set an example of how NOT to be. This person was a skilled attorney but had a mercurial personality and was masterful at undermining trust and pitting teammates against each other. It's probably a fortunate few that have not had difficult supervisors or challenging workplace dynamics. But it is important to remember that these challenges can turn out to be the experiences that propel you to the next level as a leader.

For instance, from that person I learned the importance of building relationships, inclusion, transparency, encouragement and giving voice to everyone's ideas so that they feel invested in the team and in the project or client. That's what I try to model. When I'm working with my team—from the paralegals to the associates, to the support staff—I make a point to solicit feedback and encourage them to challenge me and to challenge themselves. I remember, and I remind them, that we are all working towards the same goal.

What advice would you give an associate who wants to make partner?

It's not just your legal or technical skills; it's about "soft skills." The people you need to make an impression on are the people voting on partnership within your firm. Get to know and work with as many as possible. Consider each partner at the

firm a potential client. When communicating with any client (including internal ones), treat them as if they are the most important item on your agenda, because in that moment, they are. Be responsive. Be reliable. Be proactive. Your job is to do everything you can to make your partners look good to their clients. At firms like Mintz, all of the associates at the senior level are great technicians. What differentiates them are these other traits. It's also about having good relationships with the associates and staff that you work with. Partners take note whether someone has a reputation as being easy to work with or not. You want the partners to want you as their partner.

When it comes to career planning and navigating inside a law firm, in your opinion, what's the most common mistake you see other attorneys making?

A big mistake I see young associates make is acting as if they are an island in the stream. Good work alone is necessary, but not sufficient for success. You need to be visible and leave a positive impression on everyone you interact with. It's important to build relationships beyond your office or your trial team. That includes the people in the mail room, the pro bono department, and the office 14 states away. People talk, and you want that chatter to be that you are a team player, willing to help, and that you follow through and follow up. The associates that are responsive, proactive, and follow up are the ones that stick in our minds.

What challenges, if any, did you face or had to overcome in your career path and what was the lesson learned? How did it affect or influence your career?

I'm the first person in my family to graduate college, the first to get a master's degree, go to law school, become a professional. With that limited background, success was becoming either a doctor or a lawyer, and I don't like needles. I didn't have any professional role models to advise me about choosing classes or what kind of law I wanted to practice, or which firms I should consider for summer internships.

Because of that, my path to partnership in Big Law may not look "traditional." I tried a lot of things at a lot of places. I have had challenges along the way, but each of those steps broadened my knowledge base, informed my leadership style and made me more resilient. I know that whatever choice I make next in my career, I'm confident that I will be successful, and that is a great feeling. Getting to partner may have taken me a little longer than it would have for someone with a clearer understanding of the process, but I gained a lot of wisdom and had a lot of fun doing it my way.

Knowing what you know now about your career path, what advice would you give to your younger self?

I've been involved in a lot of initiatives promoting and supporting Latino law students and associates. Whenever I talk to them about career paths, I make a point to talk about my background because I think it's important for them to know that they can be successful even without pre-existing connections in or to the profession. I encourage them to be proud of where they come from and what they learned along the way, because that will shape the way they counsel their clients and manage their teams. There is space at the table—they just may have to rearrange the chairs to sit there.