

## How I Made Partner: 'My Personal Style Involves Mastering the Facts and Developing Strong Case Themes,' Says Dena Chen of Cooley

**"I want to inspire the next generation of lawyers to believe that there are many ways to build a successful practice. Both introverts and extroverts can develop a unique style that plays to their strengths to win cases and deliver the best service for their clients."**

By Tasha Norman

**Dena Chen, 34, Cooley, Palo Alto, California**

**Practice area:** Intellectual property litigation.

**Law school and year of graduation:** UC Berkeley, 2012.

**How long have you been at the firm?** Seven years. I joined Cooley back in 2011 as a summer associate.

**How long were you an associate at the firm?** I was an associate from 2012 to 2013 and 2015 to 2021. I clerked in the Northern District of California from 2013 to 2015. I made partner in 2022. I'm proud to be a Cooley lifer.

**What criteria did you use when deciding to join your current firm?** I was impressed by all the Cooley lifers I met during the interview process and Cooley's unique culture. People here are down-to-earth and friendly. Everyone on the team is willing to roll up their sleeves; no task is too big or too small for anyone. We work together collaboratively and have fun in the process.

**What's the biggest surprise you experienced in becoming a partner?**

Cooley does a great job of preparing its associates for partnership. The transition has been fairly seamless. But one of the pleasant surprises has been the ability to contribute more to the recruiting process by talking to law students across the country about Cooley from a new partner lens.

**What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in making you a partner?** Cooley takes a holistic approach. Candidates are evaluated based on tangible external contributions, as well as firm citizenship. My path included showcasing strong case management skills, delivering client results, developing a business case for partnership, and helping grow the firm through mentorship and recruiting.

**What's the key to successful business development in your opinion, and how do you grow professionally while everyone is navigating a hybrid work system?** Clients have many great choices when choosing a firm. The most successful business development opportunities are built on trust. One way to foster trust



**Dena Chen of Cooley**

Courtesy Photo

with clients is to demonstrate a deep familiarity with their problem and to offer concrete and creative solutions to help them achieve their business goals. Early on in my career, I focused on specializing in hardware and software patent cases. Those experiences exposed me to a wide array of technologies such as video game hardware, augmented reality mobile games, computer software, artificial intelligence, semiconductor chips, and medical devices. From there, by developing

a portfolio of litigation wins, I have been able to use those experiences to develop client trust.

We have seen great efficiency gains from the hybrid work environment. Previously, we traveled to client sites. With the normalization of virtual conferencing tools, we are able to improve productivity with regular calls involving more team members and stakeholders across time zones, office locations, and countries. Virtual conferencing has been especially beneficial for junior and summer associates, because we can include them in more client meetings, depositions, and remote court hearings.

**Who had the greatest influence on your career and helped propel you to partner?** I am deeply grateful to many people who have helped guide, mentor, and sponsor my career. Two people, in particular, who played central roles in my professional life are Judge William Alsup and Heidi Keefe.

I was fortunate enough to clerk for Judge Alsup at the beginning of my legal career. From him, I learned innumerable skills, which have shaped the way I practice law. He taught me that a strong work ethic and an open-minded willingness to absorb the facts of a case are critical building blocks.

Heidi Keefe, a partner and a member of Cooley's Board of Directors, has developed an incredible brand and practice, trying some of the toughest patent cases and delivering incredible client results. I admire her courtroom advocacy skills and commitment to raising up the next generation of trial lawyers. She has introduced me to

major tech clients in the industry, and empowered me with growth opportunities such as high-stakes oral arguments early in my career.

**What advice would you give an associate who wants to make partner? At the end of the day, a partner is a co-owner of the firm. The most successful associates truly embrace the meaning of client service. We add value for our clients by efficiently anticipating their needs, becoming a subject-matter expert in the field, and bringing concrete solutions to the table.**

**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 common mistake is not being a team player.**

**What challenges did you have to overcome in your career path and how did it influence your career?** Early in my career, a challenge I had to overcome was figuring out my personal style for litigating cases. Over time, I learned that my personal style involves mastering the facts and developing strong case themes from the very beginning of a case.

**Knowing what you know now about your career path, what advice would you give to your younger self?** Be curious and keep learning. Challenge yourself to dig into tough cases and a breadth of technologies and clients. These experiences will make you even more versatile.

**What impact would you like to have on the legal industry as a**



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**whole?** I want to inspire the next generation of lawyers to believe that there are many ways to build a successful practice. Both introverts and extroverts can develop a unique style that plays to their strengths to win cases and deliver the best service for their clients.

**What three words, phrases, goals or mantras would you use to describe your work mindset?**

- Be efficient
- Use creativity to win impossible cases
- Build strong teams

**What initiatives are you working on and what impact do you hope to achieve?** One of the most rewarding experiences for me has been serving on the Summer Associates Committee. Over the years, I have served in many roles and capacities—mentor, work coordinator, writing coach, and more. I especially love connecting with new summer associates over lunch or coffee, working with them on fun summer projects, and taking them along to a deposition or court hearing. Through my work on the Summer Associates Committee, I hope to inspire others in my position and background to build a thriving legal career and practice.