

## How I Made Partner: 'Making Partner Is Not a Passive Process,' Says Kaitland Kennelly of Cooley

By ALM Staff

June 28, 2023

**Kaitland Kennelly, 38, Cooley, New York City**

**Job title:** Partner

**Practice area:** Commercial Litigation and White Collar Defense & Investigations

**Law school and year of graduation:** University of California, Berkeley, School of Law (2013)

**How long have you been at the firm?** I was a summer associate at Cooley in 2012 and have been with the firm ever since.

**What was your criteria in selecting your current firm?** As a law student with no experience in Big Law, I found the on-campus interviewing process to be fairly daunting. I ultimately decided to go with Cooley not because of any particular metric or statistic, but because I genuinely liked everyone I met at the firm. I am thankful I trusted my gut on that one!

**Were you an associate at another firm before joining your present firm? If so, which one and how long were you there?** No, I am a Cooley "lifer"!

**What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in making you partner? Was it your performance on a specific case? A personality trait? Making connections with the right people?** As an associate, I was extremely fortunate to work with some of my firm's most prominent partners, each of whom provided me with a remarkable degree of personalized mentorship and guidance. I tried to take advantage of these opportunities by giving my all on their cases and (hopefully) making their lives a little easier in the process. I was also able to make a persuasive case that I had established a solid internal referral network since I was already serving as a resource to my colleagues in other practice groups when their clients had litigation issues.



Courtesy photo

**Kaitland Kennelly, Cooley.**

**Who had or has the greatest influence in your career and why? Please provide name, job title and a brief explanation.** Bill Schwartz, Senior Counsel at Cooley, has been an incredible mentor to me since I joined the firm, and I am certain that I would not have made partner if it weren't for his guidance and support over the years.

**What advice would you give an associate who wants to make partner?** Making partner, at least at Cooley, is not a passive process—you need to be proactive and take initiative to make it happen. It can feel awkward to discuss career ambitions as an associate, but once you decide you want to be a partner, you should start talking to partners you trust about how you can best position yourself. It's never too early to start thinking about where you fit within the broader structure of your firm, and why it makes sense from a business perspective to make you a partner.

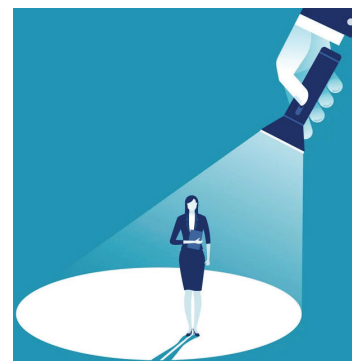
**When it comes to career planning and navigating inside a law firm, in your opinion, what's the most common mistake you see other attorneys making?**

I think litigation associates often focus on checking off boxes that show they are developing “core” litigation skills, such as taking depositions, arguing motions, drafting briefs, etc. And while these things are very important, they are not the whole story. Developing and maintaining relationships—both internal and external—is key. And for litigators, that means getting to know your corporate colleagues!

**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?** Like many lawyers, I've had several instances over the years where I felt like my tank was just completely empty. I found that getting through these periods is more manageable when you have a light at the end of the tunnel, so I've learned to prioritize taking time off to recharge. When I was younger, that could mean taking a few weeks off to explore the Philippines, Turkey, or Brazil, although you're now more likely to find me hanging out with my toddler in the kiddie pool in our backyard. Regardless of how you recharge though, taking that time is crucial. I've seen a lot of lawyers who did not take time off leave the profession because the workload was just not sustainable for them.

**Knowing what you know now about your career path, what advice would you give to your younger self?** You deserve to be here! Like many young associates, particularly young women associates, I experienced a fair amount of imposter syndrome in the early years of my career. Although I never completely vanquished it, I did eventually figure out how to use it to my advantage—I quadruple checked every email I sent for typos, made sure every case cite in every brief I worked on was correct, and obsessively took notes at every meeting or call I attended. Doing these things made my

work stronger, and over time I became more confident in my abilities, but I could have saved myself a lot of anxiety by having the realization that I was good enough for Big Law a little earlier in my career.



**Do you utilize technology to benefit the firm/practice and/or business development?** Every aspect of my practice involves technology, whether it's using the latest Relativity tool to refine a document review set or researching a judge's stats on Westlaw. And because Cooley advises some of the most innovative tech companies in the world, we get access to cutting edge technology, as well as insights from our clients on the best ways to use it.

**How would you describe your work mindset?** I am not the type of lawyer who is comfortable “winging it.” To the contrary, I am obsessed with organization and preparation. You will often find me fine tuning a color-coded chart, refining a chronology, or formatting an outline. I indulge all of my detail-oriented impulses because details are critical in litigation!

**If you participate in firm or industry initiatives, please mention the initiatives you are working on as well as the impact you hope to achieve.** Throughout my career at Cooley, I have been empowered to work on pro bono cases that both aligned with my values and raised interesting legal issues. These cases have been some of the most rewarding—and challenging—matters of my career. As an associate, they provided me with invaluable stand up experience and client contact. Now as a partner, I look forward to continuing my pro bono work, focusing primarily on LGBTQ+ and reproductive justice matters, in this new chapter of my career.