

SPOTLIGHT

Two sides of the sponsorship program

We speak to sponsors and sponsored partners about the benefits of the New Partner Sponsor program.



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New partners are better equipped than ever to offer a client experience that sets us apart thanks to the success of our New Partner Sponsor Program.

At the time of writing, the program has paired 178 sponsors with sponsored partners, adding vital global consistency to the sponsorship process and giving the sponsored partners the best possible chance of success.

The three-and-a-half-year sponsorship arrangement is part of the Firm's New Partner Training Program. It begins during the partnership candidature process and, subject to successful promotion, continues for a further three years.

Head of the New Partner Development Committee Greg Starnier, who is himself a sponsor, says: "Our New Partner Program is designed to help sponsored partners develop the essential skills and habits to be a successful partner at the Firm.

"The way we support newer partners and associates in their transition to partnership will have a long-term impact on their ability to reach their potential, the way they manage their teams and the differentiated experience they provide to our clients."

The New Partner Sponsor Program is a vital element of this. When designing the program, the team spoke to a broad range of partners to learn from their own experiences making the transition to partnership.

Greg says: "Virtually all of the partners we spoke with stressed the importance of having a good sponsor who supports your development, gives regular feedback and advice, and creates connections and opportunities."

The role of the sponsor is to develop a close relationship with the new partner, providing orientation, coaching and personal development advice. They meet often to discuss challenges, provide advice and set personal development goals.

An annual review meeting sees the sponsor and sponsored partner meet with their regional section head and a member of the New Partner Development Committee, so all stakeholders are kept updated on progress and contribute to the new partner's personal development strategy.

The sponsor is also available should any urgent support or questions arise.



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GREG STARNER,
HEAD OF THE NEW PARTNER
DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE



Greg says: “While these relationships often develop naturally, we decided it was important to introduce a formal sponsorship program to ensure consistency.

“It’s also a key element in building a sponsorship culture at the Firm, not just for new partners, but throughout the Firm.”

Frankfurt Partner Vanessa Schuermann is currently sponsoring two partners, Andreas Lischka and Sebastien Seele, in a relationship that started as they transitioned to partnership and is continuing as they develop as partners.

She says: “Sponsoring Andreas and Sebastien made perfect sense. I already knew Andreas well, while Sebastien is also in the Frankfurt office and part of our corporate finance team.

“The program helps us maintain the discipline to speak regularly – something that would be hard if we didn’t have that formal commitment because everyone is so busy.”

Keeping a regular dialogue with Andreas was easy for Vanessa because they worked on many deals together or covered similar client relationships, so already had good reasons to communicate regularly.

She says: “Interestingly, the program pushed me to discuss other topics with Andreas beyond deal matters such as how to delegate more work to the team, so that he has more time to meet with his clients and deepen the relationships, which ultimately resulted in Andreas generating additional new mandates.”

Andreas comments: “When I joined the Firm, Vanessa invested a lot of her time in explaining the specific White & Case style and approach. I remember sitting with her until 4am one Saturday, formatting and adjusting the wording of a presentation for hours to make it easier to digest for the client.

“She made me realize that it’s insufficient to be a technically excellent lawyer – it is equally important to breakdown complex matters to a level that the client will understand. By combining those two things, we can really set ourselves apart.



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ANDREAS LISCHKA,
PARTNER, FRANKFURT





“It’s reassuring and beneficial to know I have someone to go to if I have any questions because there are certain skills you are expected to have as a partner that you don’t necessarily learn or experience as an associate.”

SEBASTIEN SEELE,
PARTNER, FRANKFURT

“In addition, Vanessa has greatly helped me grow my practice. She’s introduced me to many of her clients and we’ve done a lot of business development together, using our combined experience and seamless cooperation as a selling point that’s unique in the German market. It helps us deliver a better service to our clients.”

Regarding her sponsorship of Sebastien, Vanessa says: “Sebastien and I currently have fortnightly catchups, where we can discuss anything from billing matters to client relationships.

“It also allows for an open dialogue on career progression and I’m there to support him in any way needed.

“For instance, Sebastien originates a lot of work, so we’re currently seeing how we can support him with extra resources to ease his workload.

“When I became partner, there was no program like this in place and, while I still benefit from a great mentor, it’s good to see this being done more formally to ensure that new partners who would not otherwise have ongoing support from an experienced mentor have an opportunity to get the support they need to reach their full potential faster instead of learning by trial and error.”

Sebastien agrees: “The sponsorship works hand in hand with the training we get in the New Partner Program.

“It’s reassuring and beneficial to know I have someone to go to if I have any questions because there are certain skills you are expected to have as a partner (such as billing or client management) that you don’t necessarily learn or experience as an associate.

“There have been several occasions where speaking to Vanessa has helped me prevent problems before they happen that I’d otherwise not have considered. That can only help me to provide a better experience to the client.

“I’m really grateful to the program and to Vanessa for all she continues to do for me.”

Vanessa adds: “Being a sponsor is its own reward. It’s great to see the positive impact we can have, especially as I’ve benefited from mentoring myself. A successful sponsorship should lead to a winning feeling for everybody involved.”

Vanessa also believes the sponsorship program is vital to retaining talent. She says: “The Firm makes such a big investment in associates that it would be a shame to lose some new partners early in their partnership because they take longer to reach their full potential when they don’t have the benefit of hands-on guidance from a more experienced partner.

“The program helps us maintain the discipline to speak regularly – something that would be hard if we didn’t have that formal commitment because everyone is so busy.”

VANESSA SCHUERMANN,
PARTNER, FRANKFURT



"The sponsorship program is one way in which we're helping to avoid this. It also builds the close connections and relationships that are key to us delivering a consistent, joined up client experience."

In fact, the program is closely tied into the Firm's 2025 Strategy, as Global Director of Strategy Meghann Kelley explains.

"The program supports every direction of our 2025 Strategy and encourages our senior partners to help new partners create a client experience that will set the Firm apart," she says. "From sharing client stories and advice on how to ensure a client feels prioritized, protected and understood to opening doors to new clients or new areas of the Firm to deliver a more integrated offering, this program helps to unite the partnership and reinforce a culture of trust and stewardship."

Greg adds: "Almost none of our competitors have a program of this kind, so it reflects the pioneering spirit of the Firm and creates a more united partnership, as well as showing our human side."

"The sponsor program has helped to bring more transparency, energy and accountability to the process of achieving partnership and this can only benefit the consistency of the service we provide to clients."

Miami Partner Carlos Viana has been sponsoring Jeannine Acevedo for several years.

Jeannine explains: "It's fair to say Carlos has been a mentor to me for over a decade. He has consistently supported my career, initially with on-the-deal training, and then with the development of client relationships and business generation."

"He was instrumental to my promotion in 2016, so it was natural to continue the sponsorship relationship on a more formalized basis as part of the program."

"Going from mainly focusing on client work as a senior associate to the additional responsibilities of partner could be daunting without the support of someone who has successfully navigated similar challenges in the past."

Carlos and Jeannine speak or exchange emails and text messages daily and, over the years, Carlos has provided guidance on a variety of issues.



"One of the most satisfying aspects of my career has been the privilege to train and mentor Jeannine."

CARLOS VIANA,
PARTNER, MIAMI



"Carlos has introduced me to several clients and has involved me in initiatives that have been tremendously helpful for my practice as well as our overall team's success."

JEANNINE ACEVEDO,
PARTNER, NEW YORK, MIAMI

Jeannine says: "I can always rely on him as a sounding board and to provide honest feedback."

"Carlos has introduced me to several clients and has involved me in initiatives that have been tremendously helpful for my practice as well as our overall team's success."

"He's been a wonderful example of excellence, commitment, teamwork and leadership. I'm deeply grateful for the opportunities he's given me, and I hope I can now 'pay it forward' for the benefit of our practice and the Firm."

While being a sponsor involves a significant investment of time, Carlos is more than happy to be involved in the program. He says: "One of the most satisfying aspects of my career has been the privilege to train and mentor Jeannine. Her loyalty, work ethic and focus, commitment to her team, patience and legal skills are second to none."

"In fact, I'd even say she's been the one training and mentoring me in many areas, including on adapting to generational differences and evolution across our team."

"Her excellent advice and keen eye to detail have been a fundamental part of our success and cohesiveness as the Latin American Project Development and Finance team and the wider practice group."

Hong Kong Partner Eugene Man has known his sponsored partner Anthony Wong for more than a decade, so becoming his official sponsor in 2020 made sense.

He says: "While we don't work in the same practice, the Hong Kong office is quite small, so we were already good friends."



"We also speak to each other regularly, so the sponsorship happens naturally but, as someone who didn't have an official sponsor when I became partner, I can see the benefits."

The pair meet regularly on an informal basis to discuss how things are going and share advice.

Anthony says: "Having Eugene as a sponsor is helpful because he's always there as a sounding board for me, providing invaluable experience and practical advice on how to deal with day-to-day issues.

"That's particularly important in areas of the job such as business development, financials and building a practice.

"We've also talked a lot about resourcing issues.

"It's great to know that I have the support available whenever I need it."

Eugene is also enjoying being part of the sponsorship program.

He says: "I think the program is a great idea. It's a good opportunity to pass on knowledge and I expect Anthony will be a sponsor for someone else later in his career.

"When you make partner, the first few years can be overwhelming with so many new processes and dynamics to get used to.

"It takes a while to get used to doing business as usual while trying to manage a practice at the same time.

"There's a danger that can take its toll on client relationships as you try to deliver the same level of service while taking on new responsibilities.

"That's why being able to transition into that role more smoothly is extremely important."



"Having Eugene as a sponsor is helpful because he's always there as a sounding board for me."

ANTHONY WONG,
PARTNER, HONG KONG

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