

How I Made Partner: 'Figure Out Who's Going to Vouch For You to Join the Partnership,' Says Daniel Kiang of Knobbe Martens

"You'll be counting on the partners who are closest to you to convince everyone else why they should invite you into the partnership. Go above and beyond to make sure that those partners trust your work and value you as a member of their team."

By ALM Staff

Daniel Kiang, 32, Knobbe Martens, Irvine, CA

Job title: Partner

Practice area: IP Litigation

Law school and year of graduation: UCLA School of Law, 2015

How long have you been at the firm? I've been at Knobbe Martens ever since I graduated law school in 2015. I joined the partnership in 2023.

What was your criteria in selecting your current firm?

First and foremost, I chose Knobbe Martens because of its commitment to excellence in IP law. One way in which Knobbe Martens stood out from other firms in that respect was that the vast majority of the attorneys here have impressive technical backgrounds. In

practically every case I've worked on, I've felt that we had an advantage because our team understood the technology at a deeper, more fundamental level than the other side.

Second, Knobbe Martens is a great place to work long-term. It was important for me to find a place where I could have a sustainable practice and not quickly burn out. The firm has a very reasonable billing requirement that is not as high as other firms, which means that I've had more time for professional development and have been able to enjoy time with family and friends. I've seen several attorneys leave Knobbe Martens only to come back a few years later simply because they were much happier working here. And it also helps, of



Daniel Kiang, Knobbe Martens.

Courtesy Photo

course, that the people here are some of the nicest that I've ever met.

Finally, I wanted to make sure I had a realistic chance of becoming partner. Seeing the number of associates elevated to partnership each year at Knobbe Martens reinforced that partnership was a realistic prospect here.

Were you an associate at another firm before joining your present firm? If so, which one and how long were you there? No.

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? I will probably never know exactly what was said about me during the partnership decision meeting, but I would like to think that it was a combination of consistent high-quality work and my focus on improving myself based on feedback. As an associate, I paid close attention to any feedback on my work, particularly constructive criticism, and I made sure to address any potential issues before the partnership decision. Finally, yes, it was important that I made connections with the right people—more specifically, making sure that enough of the litigation partners knew who I was and my quality of work. As a mid-level to senior associate, I sought out larger cases and larger teams so that I would have a chance to work with more

senior partners and partners from other offices.

Who had or has the greatest influence in your career and why? Please provide name, job title and a brief explanation. I obviously could not have the career I have now without the love and support of my parents, who worked hard to raise me and to provide me with a world-class education. Regardless of whether I chose to become a lawyer or something else entirely, I have my parents to thank for making sure I had the opportunities to become successful.

With respect to my legal career, I would like to thank Brian Claassen and Irfan Lateef, who are both partners at Knobbe Martens. Brian and Irfan were two of the first partners to staff me on a case when I was a new associate, and over the years, they've invested so much of their time mentoring and training me. I've spent many late nights in their offices going over our case strategy or briefs I had written. It's easy to simply redline a brief for an associate to review, hoping that they will understand the edits. But Brian and Irfan went far



Credit: Shutterstock.com

above and beyond that, taking the time to go line-by-line with me through the briefs to make sure I understood why they were making certain edits or arguments. The way I now approach a case, such as which arguments to pursue and how to obtain the desired result for our client, is largely attributable to their mentorship and training.

What advice would you give an associate who wants to make partner? Figure out who's going to vouch for you to join the partnership. At a large law firm, chances are, most partners—especially those outside of your practice group—will not be familiar with your work. You'll be counting on the partners who are closest to you to convince everyone else why they should invite you into the partnership. Go above and beyond to make sure that those partners trust your work and value you as a

member of their team. Also, see if those partners can help identify any potential issues that you can address before the partnership decision.

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? Not knowing when or how to say “no.” As attorneys, we all like to please our clients, and for associates who may not be client-facing, the “client” is actually the partner on your case. Associates who don't know when or how to say “no” can easily take on more work than they can reasonably handle, leading to poor work quality, late assignments, or burnout. So while it is important to be eager to take on new work, it is equally important to be able to manage your own docket so that you can maintain the quality of your work product.

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? One of the biggest challenges that I've faced

and continue to face is simply managing the stress that comes with being an attorney. This is not the type of job where I can simply turn off my brain after work. Even after I stop my timers and go home, I still find myself thinking about various issues in my cases. That sometimes leads to being unfocused when I'm out with friends and family or causes poor sleep. I've found that exercising is one of the best ways to take my mind off work (although I definitely need to get to the gym more frequently). I've also found that taking some time on the weekend to plan out my tasks for the week or work ahead, puts my mind at ease and has practically eliminated lying awake in bed on a Sunday night thinking about the next day.

Knowing what you know now about your career path, what advice would you give to your younger self? I would encourage myself in college to get out of my comfort zone and join more student organizations. In college, I was very focused on my studies and didn't find much time to put myself out there in

terms of social events. Now that I am in a profession that requires client interactions, oral arguments, and networking, I wish I had taken more opportunities early on to develop those social skills. I was more involved in student organizations and networking events during law school, but it would have been better if I had also made the time as a college student to develop personal skills.

How would you describe your work mindset? (If you want, provide a very brief explanation.) I like to focus on helping our client and our team find and choose the winning arguments. In any given litigation, there could be a dozen issues where the other side is wrong, but maybe only two or three of those issues would actually matter to the end result. One of the most important aspects of my role, both when I was an associate and now as a junior partner, is to identify and explain the strongest arguments so that we can devote the appropriate resources to those arguments and not waste time on less important issues.