

How I Made Partner: 'Don't Wait for Things to Fall in Your Lap,' Says Joseph Gerber of Knobbe Martens

By Law.com Staff

July 22, 2026

Joseph Gerber, 38, Partner at Knobbe Martens, New York, New York

Practice area(s): Intellectual property, trademark protection and enforcement

Law school and year of graduation: Fordham University School of Law, 2017

The following has been edited for style.

How long have you been at the firm?

Four years

What was your criteria in selecting your current firm?

I wanted to work with good people on the most well-known brands. I knew that Knobbe Martens has an outstanding trademark and brand protection platform. The firm also has an incredible depth of talent and unique culture, given that many of the partners have spent their entire legal careers at the firm. Knowing I would have the chance to draw on that collective experience and work on a top-tier trademark and brand protection team for high-profile clients was a big draw for me.

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

Yes, but my career started much earlier than that. I was a paralegal at a boutique IP firm in New York straight out of college. I wanted to get a feel for the



Courtesy photo

Joseph Gerber of Knobbe Martens.

practice of law before committing to law school. After a few years, I continued working as a paralegal while I went to law school at night. I graduated from the part time program in four years.

After law school, I wanted to expand my experience and skillset so I accepted an associate role in the commercial litigation group at a large firm in New York city. Through some unexpected projects and phone calls, I returned to the boutique IP firm and worked as an associate there for about three years before moving to Knobbe Martens.

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?

You'd have to ask my partners, but based on feedback I received it was a combination of good

work product, strong and diverse relationships within the firm, and a potential for developing business and strong client relationships. The firm saw that I worked hard for clients while doing meaningful networking and pro bono work. I also tried to make sure I was easy to work within the firm—especially from the perspective of the many paralegals and support staff I work with, given my background as a paralegal. I think the partners appreciated that I valued and respected our very knowledgeable and experienced support staff.

Who had or has the greatest influence in your career and why? Please provide name, job title and a brief explanation.

It is hard to pick just one person who has had the greatest influence; I've been lucky to learn from masters of their craft everywhere I've worked. One might argue that my career started at the family dinner table in high school. My dad and step-mom are talented and well-respected attorneys. I learned the art of argument from rich dinner-time conversations about so many things—law, philosophy, art, and more. Even though my practice is very different than my step-mother's in-house practice and my father's time on the bench, their influence was formative. My mom led a much more important and noble career as a high school teacher. The practice of law requires the same kind of patience to teach and mentor clients and associates that my mom exercised with her students (and in raising me). There's no doubt in my mind her example made an impression on me and how I work with others.

Larry Apolzon, a now-retired partner at my first IP boutique, was an early mentor. I learned a lot of substantive law from him and my direct supervisor there, a paralegal named Anca Nicolescu, long before I even went to law school.

Greg Phillips, the co-chair of Knobbe Martens' trademark and brand protection group, is a natural mentor to me and many others at the firm. I am still

learning about the business of law and so much more from him. Another partner, Rosaleen Chou, was instrumental in helping me make the lateral transition to Knobbe Martens and in guiding me on my path toward partnership.

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

It really depends on where you are in your legal career. For newer associates, I'd suggest that they really focus on developing good habits and a strong work product. For more senior associates, I'd recommend that they start thinking about taking ownership over their practice: How do you want to develop it for yourself? Who do you want to work with? What kind of clients do you want? What are you going to do to find them? Be proactive in thinking about these questions, and don't wait for things to fall in your lap—they probably won't.

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 it's really easy as a new associate to look up the ladder and be intimidated by very smart partners who have decades of experience working for some of the most high-profile clients. But there's nothing to be nervous about. The more you can connect with senior lawyers on a personal level, the easier it will be to develop relationships with people in your firm who can help guide you in your career. Even the most senior partners should want to see you succeed. Take a breath and be yourself. Asking for advice and mentoring can feel awkward but it's so important. And to that point, phone calls should not be scary! Sometimes they're the best way to think through what you're working on.

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

I think the lesson I've learned is to think for myself and trust my gut. Applying cookie-cutter

solutions to clients' unique problems doesn't work and isn't providing the best value for clients. I've also learned that if the "traditional" career path isn't working for you, or if you're not getting what you need for your professional development, it's time to take matters into your own hands. As lawyers, we spend a lot of time being advocates for our clients, but don't forget to be an advocate for yourself, too.

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

I would encourage myself to put a little more effort into making friends in law school. It was tough for me because I was at work all day and in class at night. That didn't leave much room for socializing, and even then, I had a hard time connecting with many of my colleagues who weren't also working full-time jobs. I know now how crucial those relationships are even after law school, and always take advantage of the chance to make new connections in my field and beyond.

How do you utilize technology to benefit the firm/practice and/or business development?

Like most lawyers, I am focused on developing AI tools in a way that makes my practice more efficient and brings value to clients. That being said, I am tuned in to the important discussions happening around how to reap the benefits of this technology without doing irreparable damage to our environment. Otherwise, what's the point?

How would you describe your work mindset?

Don't send it until you are convinced it is the best you can do.

Do you have any advice for improving work-life balance or promoting mental wellness to avoid burnout and maintain your career momentum?

Mental wellness is about more than just your mind. Taking good care of your body does wonders for keeping you mentally healthy. Even something as simple as switching to a standing desk has helped improve my day-to-day routine. I also think it's important to reframe your mentality when possible, and learn to see challenges as opportunities. For me, this goes a long way to help avoid feeling burnt out.

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.

I am on Knobbe Martens' Pro Bono and Associate Mentoring committees. Working with artists and non-profits through pro bono efforts has been one of the most rewarding parts of my career, even going back to my paralegal days. It has also proven to be a great professional development opportunity for younger associates. Not only do New York-based associates need pro bono hours in order to be admitted to the bar, but pro bono work is such a good opportunity to gain work experience that you might not otherwise get early on in your career. I also believe in paying it forward with respect to associate mentoring. The lawyer model is one of apprenticeship. It doesn't work if you don't embrace that. Plus, I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for the mentoring I received throughout my career.