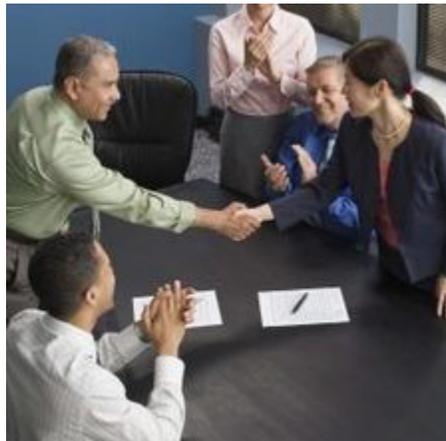


## Do You Have What it Takes to Make Partner?

June 22, 2011 by [Martha Newman, J.D., PCC, TopLawyerCoach, LLC](#)

### *Here's How to Tell if You're 'Partner' Material*



If you are a senior associate you may be asking yourself right now, "Is this the year I make partner?"

Achieving this treasured status is almost all-consuming for many lawyers. And why not? It is a position that confers money, power, respect, and security.

But, as we all know, getting the coveted seat is easier said than done. Many factors come into play, many of which may be out of your control.

So what does it take to make partner? Here are some variables as reported by Charles R. Peissel in his commentary, [9 Essentials to Making Partner](#).

**Top Lawyer Coach, LLC**  
601 Penn Street  
Fort Worth, TX 76102

817/992-6711  
[newman@toplawyercoach.com](mailto:newman@toplawyercoach.com)



## **1. Work the hours.**

More hours are better. Failure to hit the minimum is usually terminal to dreams of partnership.

Larger firms typically require extremely long hours (2,000 billables every year for seven or eight years) with no excuses accepted. Forget about vacations, and hope that sick days are few. For married lawyers, this can put a bit of a strain on one's home life. Bonuses may not kick in until 2,200 hours.

## **2. Find the work.**

Working hard is a given, but a lawyer also must find the work. Practice areas rise and fall. In some years litigation leads the pack. In other years it may be bankruptcy or M&A.

The trick is to pick the long-term winner that puts files on the desk year after year. Scanning the legal press should provide guidance. Whether this intelligence lines up with an attorney's other career goals may be problematic.

## **3. Learn the craft in depth.**

The specialist is the person in demand when problems arise. A priority for any associate should be achieving board certification in his or her chosen field. It may be of some small comfort that headhunters will be more interested if things do not work out at one's current employer.

## **4. Give speeches.**

A great source of pride (not to mention business) for any firm is having its lawyers speak before large groups. Putting together these speeches and their accompanying papers can be challenging for associates spending every waking hour at the office cranking out billable hours. Only a few hardy souls can handle the load.

## **5. Bring in clients.**

Nothing warms the cold hearts of senior partners faster than seeing a new client walk in the front door. Immediate rewards often flow to any associate who can make this happen. Even billable hours tend to fade to the background compared to this achievement.

The mysteries of how a lowly associate can grab clients are beyond the scope of this piece, but critical elements are intense networking, volunteering, and socializing inside and outside the firm.

**Top Lawyer Coach, LLC**  
601 Penn Street  
Fort Worth, TX 76102

817/992-6711  
[newman@toplawyercoach.com](mailto:newman@toplawyercoach.com)



## **6. Become indispensable.**

Most firms have clients that are critically important to their futures. Servicing those clients and doing outstanding work get noticed.

Be aware that the billing attorneys for those clients will try to control all access to the client. An associate who hopes to make partner must become the billing attorney's new best friend (hopefully, without being terribly obvious). Making the billing attorney look good and building a successful, supportive relationship will pay off in the long run.

## **7. Find a mentor.**

The old adage, "It's not what you know, but who you know," certainly comes into play. Having a connection of some sort -- family, house of worship, country club, civic organization, prep school, college, law school, AA meetings, etc. -- with a senior partner can catapult an associate to the head of the queue.

## **8. Minimize mistakes.**

The firm will expect associates to live up to their fabulous resumes. No one expects perfection, but a major stumble can eliminate a would-be partner from the competition.

Associates must pay attention to the details of their practices. They should be alert to situations that expose them to extraordinary legal risk, and try to bring in others to share that risk. Going for the big win alone could cost an associate the game. Above all, associates must not get sued.

## **9. Be eligible for partnership in a year when the economy is improving.**

Every would-be partner is seeking a piece of a pie that, hopefully, is growing in size. If such is the case, entry into the clique should not negatively impact its existing members.

The opposite is true when the economy is headed south. Unless an associate brings new business to the table or, alternatively, his or her departure would cause a significant drop in business, chances of a warm welcome into the partnership drop considerably.

The bottom line: It takes sacrifice and effort to make partner. Do you have what it takes?

**Top Lawyer Coach, LLC**  
601 Penn Street  
Fort Worth, TX 76102

817/992-6711  
[newman@toplawyercoach.com](mailto:newman@toplawyercoach.com)

