

## How I Made It



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Q&A

### How I Made Partner: 'For Me, It's All About Client Service,' Says Joey Norman of Moore & Van Allen

"I've learned that even if something is long and challenging, if you're willing to do the work and see it through, you will get there."

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#### Joey Norman, 39, Moore & Van Allen, Charlotte, North Carolina.

**Practice area:** Corporate, transportation.

**Law school and year of graduation:** Wake Forest University School of Law, 2012.

**How long have you been at the firm?** Seven years. I was an associate from 2015 to 2021. I made partner on Jan. 1, 2022.

**Were you an associate at another firm before joining your present firm?** Yes. K&L Gates (KLG) for two years and left in February 2015.



Joseph "Joey" Norman/courtesy photo

**What criteria did you use when deciding to join your current firm?** I knew that Moore & Van Allen (MVA) had a reputation for being one of the premier law firms in the Carolinas, and I knew some people at the firm. The Corporate Practice Group offered me the opportunity to join and transition to a practice I always wanted to work in. I was an associate at KLG in its private equity mergers and acquisitions practice at the time. MVA's Corporate Group is unique, functioning as general counsel externally to a handful of clients. We work in the operational realm in addition to M&A deals and credit agreements, so I was excited to have the opportunity to join this group.

**What's the biggest surprise you experienced in becoming a partner?** Becoming partner let me peek behind the curtain to see what it takes to run a successful law firm. As an associate, I didn't fully understand what goes into running a firm of our size. I believe the firm's success is due in



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large part to its excellent management.

**What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in making you a partner?** I'm not sure there was any specific decision point; it was likely my performance over time. In 2018, when I was a fifth-year associate, our practice team leader left the firm to go in-house with one of our clients. When he left, our group leader, Jeremy Godwin, trusted me to step into that role, and I took ownership of those client relationships and the work product. I like to think it was a seamless transition.

**What's the key to successful business development in your opinion and how do you grow professionally while everyone is navigating a hybrid work system?** For me, it's all about client service. If you understand your clients' businesses, strategies and goals, and provide practical legal advice, clients will quickly recommend you to other potential clients.

Perhaps more importantly, I make it a priority to have more than a transactional relationship with my clients. I want to know about them personally—their families, their backgrounds, where they go on vacation—and I share the same with them, even if it's all virtual. I want them to feel completely comfortable coming to me with anything they need, knowing I'll be ready to help. That philosophy is something I learned from my wife, Amy, who is a sales executive at an IT solutions firm. Throughout her career, I have seen how she builds relationships with her clients and helps them with their business needs. Amy fosters clients connections as personal relationships. I've taken that to heart and I work hard to emulate her approach.

**Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to partner?** Besides my wife, James Wyche, COO at Pike Enterprises and former member and head of securities at MVA, was my first mentor in the legal field and taught me how to be a lawyer and serve my clients by identifying and putting their end goals first. Ben Pickett, counsel and general manager of Government Affairs at Nucor Corp. and former member at MVA, showed me how to foster client relationships to grow a practice. Our group leader and co-head of the Corporate Practice Group, Jeremy Godwin, has mentored me throughout my career and continues to serve as my sounding board on both substantive legal issues and career challenges and growth. Jeremy's confidence in me and his mentorship is one of the great influences on my career.

**What advice you could give an associate who wants to make partner?** Know your client's business—understand what they do, how they make money, what their risks are and all that goes into their operations. Know their end game and their strategy for getting there. When you give advice, you aren't there to tell them "No." Your role is to present them the risks and let them make the judgment call.

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***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?*** *Awareness. There are two ways I see lawyers lacking awareness. One is not being aware of relationship dynamics, and the other is not being aware of the perceptions you create by doing something. That's something my mentor James Wyche impressed on me early on. Before you do anything, make a call or write an email, put yourself in the other person's shoes and understand how your communication will be received. Sometimes I receive an email and I can tell the sender didn't fully consider how it would come across when they sent it.*

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**What challenges did you face in your career path and how did it influence your career?** Before I went to law school, I worked in finance. In 2008, I worked at Wachovia, getting a front-row seat to the financial crisis. It was scary. I was sitting at my desk when Bear Stearns fell. Our company was sold twice in two days. There was a lot of anxiety. That's when I decided to go to law school, which is what I really wanted to do. Back then, sitting at my desk at Wachovia, I was looking at a long road to where I am now. Looking back, I've learned that even if something is long and challenging, if you're willing to do the work and see it through, you will get there.

**Knowing what you know now about your career path, what advice would you give to your younger self?** I say this to younger associates all the time: There are going to be days when you make a mistake and you think the world is ending. Mistakes are going to happen. Contrary to how it seems at the time, it's not the end of the world or your career. Everyone makes mistakes and almost all of them can be corrected without a lot of effort. I can remember four or five of those days in my career. Don't let those days throw you off-track. Own them, acknowledge them and learn from them.

**What impact would you like to have on the legal industry as a whole?** The coronavirus pandemic has been a major disruption—disrupting the way we work, the way we live and our priorities. It has really changed the market dynamics for talent. Everyone has staffing and HR issues. The talent has

leverage and they don't want more money; they want more time. I think the pandemic showed people what matters. People want to enjoy their lives beyond just making money. In our team, our firm, our industry, we have to understand that and adjust. It's OK to take care of your health, and your family. I have three kids. Before the pandemic, I might not have taken four days off work for vacation, but now I see how much I've already sacrificed and I think it's OK to take some time off to hang out with my kids. As I take more of a leadership role at my firm, I want to champion these quality-of-life priorities.

**What lessons, if any, did you learn in 2020/2021 (the COVID years)?** Expect the unexpected. No one expected COVID. When everything shut down, things looked dire. We thought it would be the next Great Recession. Then the next thing you know, our clients needed us more than they ever needed us before. COVID created so many opportunities to guide our clients through new and complex situations; things we never could have imagined. At the same time, I never thought I could work from home and be good at it. But it worked.

**What key element would you like to focus on for 2022.** Getting back together. I'm looking forward to getting back together with my colleagues on my team within this new, more flexible normal. I can't wait to start seeing clients face-to-face to foster those relationships. And I want to do in-person networking again, to develop new relationships. It's going to be a good year to reengage with the world.

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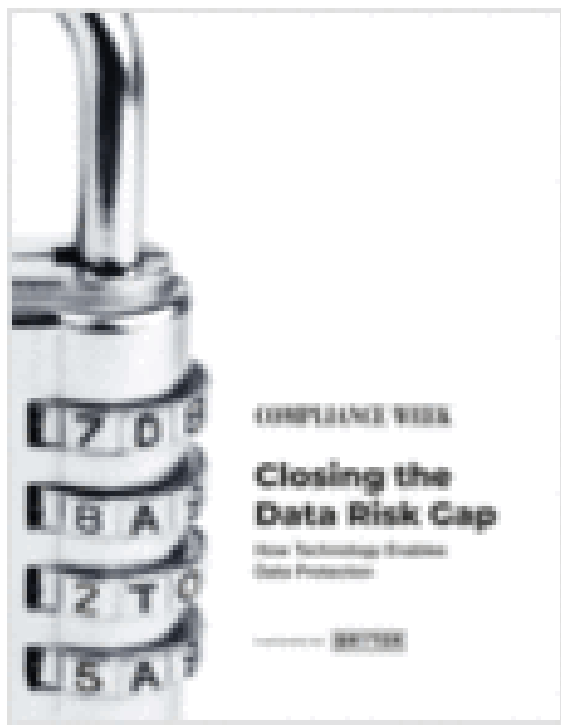
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