

## How I Made Partner: 'I Started Bringing in Cases That Generated Work for Me and for Others at the Firm,' Says Winston Liaw of Farella Braun + Martel

"I'm just getting started! One of the things that attracted me to the legal practice was that you're always growing and learning new things."

By Tasha Norman

**Winston Liaw**, Farella Braun + Martel, San Francisco.

**Practice area:** Intellectual property litigation with a focus on patent infringement litigation and IP counseling for technology companies.

**Law school and year of graduation:** University of Chicago Law School, 2010.

**How long have you been at the firm?** I've been at Farella Braun + Martel for six years.



**Winston Liaw**  
courtesy photo

**How long were you an associate at the firm?**

I was an associate at Farella for six years before making partner in 2021. Previously, I was an associate at Irell & Manella in Los Angeles from 2010 to 2012, and then an associate at Keker & Van Nest (now Keker, Van Nest & Peters) in San Francisco from 2012 to 2015.

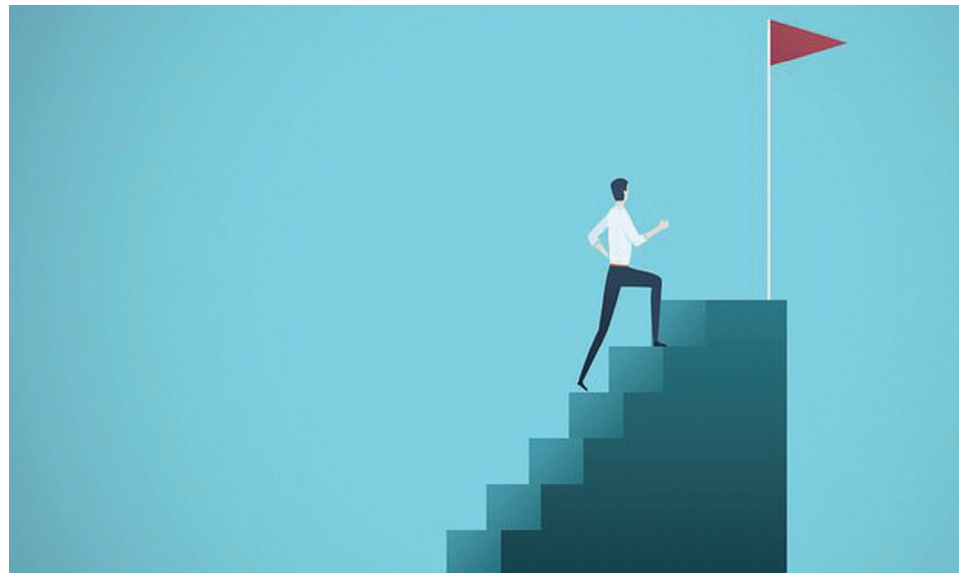


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**What's the biggest surprise you experienced in becoming a partner?**

It's hard to say what the biggest surprise was, but I was certainly surprised by how little things changed upon making partner. One of my mentors once told me "if you want to become partner, you should start acting like one," meaning I had already started taking ownership of cases, bringing in business, and managing bills and client relationships. Farella is great at

giving associates early responsibility, so to a certain extent as a senior associate I was already being treated like a partner when it came to substantive work on cases.

**What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in making you a partner?** As far as I can tell there wasn't one deciding point for the firm. 2018 through 2020 were particularly good years for me, as I was getting good results on the matters I worked

on, and also started bringing in cases that generated work not just for me, but for others at the firm as well. Farella has a Talent Initiative program where high potential women and diverse associates are provided with sponsorship opportunities to advance to partnership, so when I was selected for that, it was a positive sign from the firm.

From my perspective though, my big turning point was when I brought in my first matter in my practice area. A friend of mine was head of intellectual property at a large tech company and asked me to help with some IP counseling. I was blown away, and frankly honored, that he had come to me for assistance, and it removed a barrier in my mind about my ability to generate work. Associates often spend most of their time thinking about their casework and getting the substantive aspects right, and the thought of bringing in new work often falls by the wayside. Bringing in my first matter gave me the confidence and motivation to continue exercising my business development chops.

***What's the best piece of advice you could give an associate who wants to make partner?*** *I think the most important thing an associate can do is meet great mentors and sponsors. You want mentors who are supportive, have your best interest in mind, and also aren't afraid to tell you when you're messing up.*

**Describe how you feel about your career now that you've made partner.**

I feel like I'm just getting started! One of the things that attracted me to the legal practice was that you're always growing and learning new things, and as a partner, you have more control over the direction of your career and practice. For example, most of my current practice consists of patent litigation, but I've also enjoyed providing IP counseling. So, moving forward, the particular mix of litigation vs. counseling might change, and I'd also like to revisit practice areas I've litigated in previously, like trade secret litigation. The partners at Farella are also a great bunch of people, so I'm also looking forward to continue calling them my colleagues in the years to come. I think good times lie ahead.

**What's the key to successful business development in your opinion?**

The key for me has been to develop business in a way that fits my style and personality. There are a variety of business development tools to choose from, but I've historically leaned toward a more personal approach to meeting new contacts and maintaining relationships with existing ones. But that approach may not suit you, so it's important to see what works best given your personality.

**What's been the biggest change, day-to-day, in your routine since becoming a partner?** I think the

biggest change has been an increase in mentoring and nonbillable hours. I've always been a big believer of mentoring and providing feedback, but before I would refrain from providing advice unless asked, as I felt a little awkward as an associate giving unsolicited feedback to another associate. Now, with the title change, giving feedback and advice is a little more natural (and expected).

**Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to partner?**

There hasn't been one single greatest influence in my path to partnership. At Farella, partners in the IP group like Jim Day, Eugene Mar and Jeff Fisher were extremely supportive and open with me, and partners outside of the IP group like Chris Locke, Jim Colopy and Phil Peters were very supportive as well. Outside of the firm, friends who are now in-house like Patrick Zhang at Atlassian and Andy Nguyen at Adobe have been extremely influential in my path to partnership, and prior colleagues like Ellisen Turner, a partner now at Kirkland & Ellis, have been hugely positive influences. While each of these folks helped me in some way on my path to partnership, whether it be providing me with substantive opportunities or mentorship, or acting as a sounding board if I had any problems, they all gave me the belief that I could become a partner.