

How I Made Partner: 'I Have Traveled an Incredibly Challenging Road, but I've Persevered and I Feel Equipped to Handle Anything,' Says Cyrus Chin of Balch & Bingham

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By Tasha Norman

Cyrus Chin, 42, Balch & Bingham, Houston

Practice area: Mergers and acquisitions, corporate finance and securities, corporate governance.

Law school and year of graduation: Northeastern University School of Law, J.D., 2005; Temple University Beasley School of Law, LL.M., 2006.

How long have you been at the firm? I've been at Balch & Bingham for approximately 18 months. I made partner in 2022.

Were you an associate at another firm before joining your present firm? Yes, I was an associate for seven years at BoyarMiller in Houston. I joined Balch in September 2020.

What criteria did you use when deciding to join your current firm? In no particular order, my primary criteria were practice, potential and people.

I've developed a sophisticated corporate practice, and I wanted to make sure I landed in a place where I could continue to work with entrepreneurs in the middle-market space. I also wanted to be in a place where the goal was to intentionally grow a corporate practice group—Balch had recently expanded to the Texas market, and there is a lot of energy and effort around growing new relationships for

the firm throughout Texas. Finally, I wanted to be at a firm with a culture that values and promotes empathy, compassion and kindness every day, and I've found that at Balch.

What's the biggest surprise you experienced in becoming partner? Thankfully, there haven't been any surprises. You should know exactly what you are getting into if and when you become a partner.

What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in making you partner? I think the primary deciding point was my demonstrated ability to operate consistently at a high level, meeting or exceeding both client expectations and firm expectations. I demonstrated that through my work on a daily basis, through supervising and mentoring younger associates and by making valuable contributions to the firm by supporting and leading internal initiatives. In addition, a critical part of my career advancement has been the support of other attorneys I worked with, who then advocated for my promotion. Fortunately, the process for becoming partner at Balch is very transparent, and I was able to navigate the process with confidence.

What's the key to successful business development, in your opinion? I think it's more of a com-



Cyrus Chin, Balch.
Courtesy Photo

bination lock than a key. Giving more than you take is a large part of that combination, so finding creative ways to directly and indirectly provide value and to be a reliable resource for others is very important.

Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to partner? Philip Dunlap is the managing partner of the Houston office of Balch. Philip and I worked together for six years at a previous firm before I joined Balch, and he was a mentor to me then and continues to mentor me at Balch. He is very familiar with my work, and we have a great relationship. He was instrumental in advocating for my promotion to partner.

What advice you could give an associate who wants to make part-

ner? I think that one of the challenges an associate faces is making the transition from feeling like you should only do what you are told by more-senior attorneys to being an active contributor to the success of a matter. To that end, in addition to understanding what decisions have been made on a matter, I always encourage our younger associates to ask why decisions are being made. When you start to understand the why, you make better decisions and learn to identify and anticipate issues, which ultimately leads to more responsibility.

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 a common mistake, especially for younger attorneys, is focusing solely on the work. Mastering your craft is important, but make time to get to know the people you are working with. Remote work definitely hasn't made that any easier. But to the extent you can pick up the phone or walk down the hall to someone's office rather than relying on email, those small, personal interactions will make a difference in your working relationships and ultimately, your career advancement.

What challenges did you overcome in your career path? What was the lesson learned? "If any?" I would love to be one of those attorneys that could answer "none" to this question!

• **Challenge 1:** I went to a regional law school located in the Northeast and for personal reasons, ended up taking the bar in Texas, where my law school was not well known and the alumni network is minimal. In addition, my law school had a unique take on grading and ranking (written evaluations vs. letter grades/GPA and no class rankings), which made it difficult for potential

employers to compare my resume to other candidates. The combination of not graduating from a top-ranked school in the top X% of my class in a "buyer's market" meant that it took me over a year to find my first job after passing the bar.

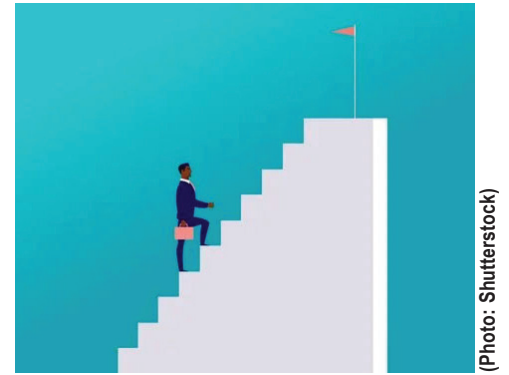
Lesson Learned: be very thoughtful about the relationship between your law school and your final destination, whether that destination is a geographic one or a particular practice area. Talk to alumni more than career services.

• **Challenge 2:** I started my career practicing corporate and tax law in late 2007. By the fall of 2008, the Great Recession was in full swing, and by early 2009 I was laid off along with many other attorneys. Many young attorneys that were laid off or passed over by law firms for employment during this period ended up taking a different career path altogether. But I knew at this point what I wanted to do for my career, and frankly, with the weight of student loans, I didn't have much of a choice but to continue to pursue this particular career. I did contract work (document review) for the next 3.5 years.

Lesson Learned: Although this work didn't directly advance my career, I used this time to make relationships that I value to this day.

• **Challenge 3:** Law firms, like most offices, are comprised of people with different personalities, which can lead to conflict. Learning how to navigate the political nature of a law firm is challenging, so taking the time to nurture the relationships you value to build your own political capital is critical.

Lesson Learned: At the end of the day, you have to live with yourself and your decisions, but what I've learned is to not ever compromise your integrity in the process.



(Photo: Shutterstock)

Looking around at where I am and where I started, I recognize that I have traveled an incredibly challenging road, but I've persevered, and I feel equipped to handle anything at this point.

Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give to your younger self? To paraphrase A. Burr to A. Ham, talk less (listen), smile more (be kind), and do let them know what you're against and what you're for. I hesitated to show my co-workers my personality, but when you are in the right place with the right people, opening up to others will let you be the best version of yourself while also strengthening your relationships with those around you, which is key to helping your career progress.

What impact would you like to have on the legal industry? I'm focusing on having a positive impact on my family, friends and my community. If we all focus on these things, we can collectively create meaningful change in the world.

What lessons did you learn in 2020/2021 (the COVID-19 years)? There will always be struggles in life. You just have to pick who you want to struggle with.

What three key elements would you like to focus on for 2022? Make friends (expand your network), pursue happiness (find a hobby and commit to it), be grateful (show people you love them while you still can).