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How I Made Partner: 'Create Your Own Niche,' Advises Tyson & Mendes' Cayce Lynch

"You no longer need to be a 'traditional' lawyer to advance—there is room for creativity. Contrary to conventional wisdom, it is possible to carve out your own path or create your own niche."

By Tasha Norman | November 20, 2020



(//images.law.com/contrib/content/uploads/sites/292/2018/12/How-Partner-Woman-Art-201811091652-1.jpg)

Photo: Shutterstock

Cayce Lynch, 34, Tyson & Mendes

City: San Diego

Job title: Administrative Partner

Practice area: Handles all administrative efforts for the nationwide insurance defense firm.

Law school and year of graduation: William S. Richardson School of Law, University of Hawaii at Manoa, 2011.



(//images.law.com/contrib/content/uploads/sites/292/2020/11/Cayce-Lynch-Vert-202011201135.jpg) Cayce Lynch.

How long have you been at the firm and what other firms have you worked for? My career path has been a bit unconventional. Before joining Tyson & Mendes in late 2012, I served as a law clerk in the Hawaii Supreme Court. I also spent 10 months at Jackson Lewis in Colorado before returning to Tyson & Mendes in May 2015. In total, I have been with the firm for seven years.

What year did you make partner at your current firm? Made partner in May 2017; named equity partner in January 2020.

What's the biggest surprise you experienced in becoming partner? Becoming partner has reinforced how important it is to have a strong team and made me realize how much I rely on my team members to succeed on behalf of the firm. I am collaborating with so many other talented people to succeed and get the job done.

What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in making you partner? I had a traditional law practice for about three years, but the last four to five years have been completely different. As an associate, I did my best to look at things from a partner or leadership perspective and look more globally at how I could be of best use for the firm. I always tried to identify a need—whether it was a client need or a firm need—and find solutions to fill those needs. That often meant I was also the one volunteering to execute those solutions. That is how I wound up being promoted to

partner, then to partner of client relations a year later, and then to my current role of administrative partner where I oversee all administrative, accounting, finance, IT, marketing, and branch office operations for the firm.

Describe how you feel now about your career now that you've made partner. I am first incredibly honored and humbled to be the youngest person in the firm to make equity partner. Many of us go to law school because we want to do something meaningful or fight for justice—that is what you strive for when you first step into a firm. Despite the big challenges ahead in relation to the current health crisis, I am optimistic and encouraged by the fact that with this ownership stake, I have greater power to bring about change within our firm and solve problems as they arise.

It is also exciting to be part of a firm that continues to expand, even during these uncertain times. We continue to search for and hire experienced trial attorneys from around the country—it has been really rewarding to have a key role in the growth of this firm and help make that growth truly sustainable.

What's the key to successful business development in your opinion? I have to cite Bob Tyson (our managing partner) here: "Do more." Over the last few years, I have found myself traveling across the country, hosting dinners and events for clients, giving speeches, etc. Even while the other requirements of my position are a priority, I know how important it is to make the time to do these things. Again, it is about taking a more global perspective on your career and understanding development is a major component for advancement in most firm structures (though it is certainly not the *only* thing, especially at our firm!).

What's been the biggest change, day to day, in your routine since becoming partner? My role has changed so much since becoming partner. As my role in administration grew, my day-to-day practice has become more of a "meeting practice." I spend the majority of my day in meetings (now all virtual meetings, of course), so I rarely have an hour of just being at my desk to work on something. My days are all very collaborative, which is a very different kind of day than most partners, both at Tyson & Mendes and at other firms.

Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to partner? When I started as a first-year associate, Tyson & Mendes was still very small with only 25-30 lawyers. Managing partner Bob Tyson was actively involved in a lot of the firm's cases, and our main trial lawyer. We worked collaboratively together on many case files back then, so he saw my skills and strengths early on and became both a mentor and champion of mine.

As I moved into my administrative role, founding partner Pat Mendes became an incredible mentor and ally. The wisdom and thoughtfulness with which he approached our early growth strategy has been inspirational for me in leading us into our next phase of growth.

I was also lucky to be surrounded by amazing women who supported me in the firm, like partner Mina Miserlis, who became the firm's third equity partner (after Bob and Pat). While we have not worked closely together on cases, Mina has always been there to provide encouragement and emotional support and help me fix problems even if they were not her own.

What advice you could give an associate who wants to make partner? When you are an associate, you are often trained to focus solely on what is right in front of you—your caseload, your immediate work, and your billable hours. But it is also important to consider the partners you are supporting and how you might make their lives easier. This goes back to proactively identifying needs and potential solutions. The thoughtfulness of anticipating and fulfilling a partner's needs—even before they are aware of them—shows a dedication that will take you far.

I also think it is important to note there are so many ways to thrive in the practice of law that may not have been obvious when you started law school. The world is changing, especially with the COVID-19 crises. As I have learned over the last few years, you no longer need to be a "traditional" lawyer to advance—there is room for creativity. Contrary to conventional wisdom, it is possible to carve out your own path or create your own niche.

Continue to communicate! Since we cannot be together in-person right now, find ways to communicate with clients and colleagues in a meaningful way. Picking up the phone to call a client or partner to see if there is anything you can help with—even if they do not have anything at the moment—is always appreciated and helps you to stay top of mind. And, make yourself invaluable by anticipating their needs before being asked.

Tell us about your efforts to increase support for female attorneys and staff within your firm? Before I was promoted to partner, I founded (and continue to chair) Tyson & Mendes' Women's Initiative, which provides mentoring and support for not just our female attorneys and staff, but also our female clients in the insurance industry (which also tends to be very male-dominated). Through the Women's Initiative, we host several internal and external events throughout the year to discuss important gender issues that are relevant to the legal and insurance industries. These events, while educational, have also become important networking opportunities for our attendees and serve as support groups for women looking to level the playing field with their male counterparts.

Internally, the focus of the Women's Initiative is to take a look at firm policies with an eye toward gender equity and propose solutions. As my first official act as partner, and in my capacity as chair of the Women's Initiative, I formally proposed a paid maternity leave policy for everyone in the firm. While this was a significant step for working mothers, the work continues.

Finally, I am proud that our firm takes such a well-rounded approach to our partnership criteria. We know that being a working mom can sometimes make business development challenging, so we consider many other factors when deciding to promote someone within the firm. Business development is important, but it is not everything!

Why is making a concerted effort to recruit and retain female attorneys so important in the legal industry? Simply put—diversity makes us better. By having a diverse group of attorneys and staff, we come up with more creative solutions for our clients and develop better solutions to our internal challenges.

What advice would you give to young female attorneys on navigating this still male-dominated industry? When we talk about championing women's issues, we must acknowledge that women cannot do it alone. We need men, and particularly the men in power, to be involved and be our champions—just as much as we as women need to champion each other. I have been so fortunate to have that support from our founding partners, but I also know how unique that support is.

The best advice I can give is to embrace mentorship opportunities whenever they arise—and from whomever, they come. If that relationship develops naturally with a woman, great. But in this male-dominated industry, if the opportunity to learn from a male ally comes your way—do it! Do not shy away from it.

Also, we become the best at helping others and leading from a place of service when we have taken care of ourselves. The demands of this industry can, at times, seem to completely take over your life. I am very lucky to work in a firm that gives us the space to take care of ourselves, and I try to make that a priority, as hard as it is sometimes.