

How I Made Practice Group Co-Chair: 'I Am Good at Building Relationships With Colleagues in Various Offices,' Says Daniel L. Zelenko of Crowell & Moring

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By Tasha Norman

Daniel L. Zelenko, 50, Crowell & Moring, New York.

Job Title & Practice Area: Partner, co-chair of White Collar & Regulatory Enforcement Group.

Law school and year of graduation: American University/ Washington College of Law '97.

How long have you been at the firm? Since 2008.

What year were you promoted to your current role? I became chair of the White Collar & Regulatory Enforcement Group in 2017, which was about nine years after I joined Crowell & Moring.

Were you a partner at another firm before joining your present firm? Other than being a summer associate, I did not have any law firm experience prior to joining Crowell & Moring directly from the government. So, I had a lot to

learn about law firm life and culture. One thing that really appealed to me about Crowell was how they seemed to understand the path from government to private practice and how to support new partners making that transition.

What do you think was the deciding point for the firm to elect you to your current role? I try to be visible in our practice area, both internally and externally. I am also good at building relationships with colleagues in various offices, which I think was a key factor in my being appointed practice leader.

What's the key to successful business development in your opinion? In my practice area, in particular, it's not really about "pitching" for work. The key is developing relationships and trust with clients and colleagues, so they know you



Courtesy Photo

Dan Zelenko

have their back when a sensitive legal issue arises. Demonstrating to a client that you are in their corner, and you care not just about the legal side but also about them personally makes a huge difference. Most of our clients have never been through a sensitive government probe or investigation, so making sure you are there for them to lean on is critical.

Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel

you to your current role? One person that sticks out is a former mentor of mine at the [Department of Justice], Reginald Tom (former DOJ trial attorney), who tragically passed away at a young age. Reggie had an incredible work ethic and showed me how preparation is really the key to success. I was lucky enough to have watched him prepare for a grand jury presentation and then have him hand over the reins to me, leading to my getting a chance to get up in front of 20 strangers and question a witness under oath.

What's the best piece of advice you could give to a partner who is interested in leading a practice

group? Be accessible, be flexible and get to know your colleagues outside of the office.

Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give to yourself and/or what would you do differently? Understanding how a client's business operates is super important. Learn as much as you can about the industry, the jargon, and the customs so you can provide insightful legal advice and be able to speak the same language as your client. We often get called upon to represent clients in very specific industries like financial services, healthcare and cyber, so teaming up with colleagues who are



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very deep in those areas is also a huge plus.

How would you describe your work mindset? Take your work seriously but not yourself. I have been notorious in our office for pulling various “April Fool’s Day” pranks as a form of initiation for some of our newer lawyers. I am already cooking up a plan for next year...