

How I Made Partner: As the Firm's 1st Black Female Partner, Rachel Shaw of Pryor Cashman Shattered the Glass Ceiling

"Always be the most prepared person in the room. Everyone, including your superiors, will take notice."

By Tasha Norman

Rachel E. Shaw, 42, Pryor Cashman Office: New York City.

Practice Group: Hotel and hospitality, real estate, and litigation groups.

Law school and year of graduation: University at Buffalo School of Law, 2003.

How long have you been at the firm? Four and a half years.

How long were you an associate at the firm? I was counsel when I joined and I was in that position from August 2016 to December 2020 when I was elevated to a partner.

Were you an associate at another firm before joining your present firm? I was an associate at the firm Stempel Bennett Claman & Hochberg for nearly eight years, and then at Hogan Lovells for just under three years.

What year did you make partner at your current firm? December 2020.

What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in making you a partner? I think it was in large part due to my overall dedication to the real estate litigation group, and the firm as a whole. I think the firm recognized and appreciates that I am the epitome

of a team player with a positive attitude, enthusiasm for and loyalty to Pryor Cashman.

I joined Pryor Cashman in a lateral move with extensive, in-depth experience in a niche practice. Because of that, I have been able to provide support to partners from all across the firm who routinely contact me for guidance in providing advice to their clients. In addition, in the four and a half years I've been a member of the real estate litigation group, I have broadened my practice considerably, taking on significant roles in some of the most complex, high-profile commercial disputes the firm has handled in recent years.

Lastly, following a request to spearhead the formation of a Diversity Committee upon initially joining Pryor Cashman, I helped form the firm's inaugural Diversity Committee and have been nominated by my peers to act as chair. Even in the committee's nascent stage, I have arranged the firm's membership to the prestigious Law Firm Antiracism Alliance, secured a firmwide implicit-bias training, implemented various diversity initiatives across the firm, and have assisted in



Rachel E. Shaw

courtesy photo

the hiring of two diverse associates within the last few months.

What's the biggest surprise you experienced in becoming a partner? I'm Pryor Cashman's first black female partner. In addition to all of the love and support I've received from being promoted, the recognition and acknowledgment of that achievement from my network, and from all over the country, has been incredible. In particular, the recognition I've received from other women attorneys has been quite surprising. From the female partners at my firm, to the women of various net-

working groups, to my lifelong friends, it seemed like every woman in my life was right there with me, celebrating and honoring my success, recognizing the impact of the role I play in shattering that glass ceiling for women in the law who look like I do.

Describe how you feel about your career now that you've made partner. I feel motivated. I feel as if I'm just getting started. I recognize the role I play for my junior colleagues as a diverse partner in the male-dominated field of real estate and in overall law firm culture. I feel as if it's my responsibility to normalize BIPOC (Black and Indigenous people of color) being experts at things other than diversity initiatives. While I am incredibly proud of the achievements of our Diversity Committee, I am so proud of my firm for recognizing, nurturing and honoring my skills as a fierce, competitive and determined real estate litigator, and I look forward to building on those skills and really building a practice for myself at Pryor Cashman.

What's the key to successful business development in your opinion? Your reputation. Earlier in my career, I had the naive notion that taking a "scorched earth" approach in every case would ultimately lead to success. That's the farthest from the truth. In fact, it was my husband, who I met as opposing counsel in a heated litigation, who advised that I'd be a lot more successful, and therefore, become more marketable, if I approached each new

matter with grace, calm, and with an open mind towards resolution. Over time, and due in large part to the mentorship I've received from the partners at Pryor Cashman, I've been able to really make a name for myself, not as the young hothead I once was, but as a distinguished, prepared and sophisticated partner. In my experience, clients don't want the loudest guy in the room, and people don't often respect the loudest guy in the room. The referrals I've received and the clients I've been able

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to bring into the firm are due in large part to being respectful at all times, and maintaining and nurturing positive relationships with my adversaries, colleagues and friends.

What's been the biggest change, day-to-day, in your routine since becoming a partner? Knowing that the buck stops with me in certain mat-

ters. Thankfully, Pryor Cashman is a very collaborative and collegial firm, so I know I can always count on the advice and guidance of my peers, but as a partner, I am now responsible for the work that goes out the door and for deciding which litigation strategy to take. In one matter I'm working on now, I obsessed for days over whether we should take a specific approach in a new litigation, and the weight of that decision really struck me.

Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to a partner? Eric Sherman, a partner in the real estate litigation group at Pryor Cashman. Eric and I met early in my career and he has been an incredible mentor to me. He has always guided me through complicated cases, provided advice and support in making career decisions, and supported me in my rise to partner at Pryor Cashman. He's also a wonderful and hilarious friend, and I cannot imagine where I'd be today without him.

What's the best piece of advice you could give an associate who wants to make partner? Always be the most prepared person in the room. Everyone, including your superiors, will take notice. If you're always prepared, you will gain the confidence of your clients, your superiors and your team. There's nothing more valuable for your career trajectory than the firm knowing it can count on you.