

How I Made Office Managing Partner: 'I Was Intentional About Getting Out and Meeting as Many People as Possible Across the Firm,' Says Gerry Williams of DLA Piper

"You're not seeing the big picture if you remain within a bubble."

By Tasha Norman

Gerry Williams, DLA Piper, Atlanta.

Job title: Managing partner, Atlanta office.

Practice area: Private equity/corporate.

Law school and year of graduation: Indiana University Maurer School of Law, 1995.

How long have you been at the firm? Thirteen years.

Were you a partner at another firm before joining your present firm? I was a partner at Lord, Bissell & Brook and Hunton & Williams before I moved to DLA Piper, where I'm happy to say I've been for more than 13 years.

What year did you make office managing partner at your current firm? I was named office managing partner of the Atlanta office in January 2022. However, I have served in other leadership roles at the firm for some time. I'm a member of the firm's executive and policy committees, vice chair of the Private Equity Group, Southeast,

and chair of the Georgia corporate and securities practice.

What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in naming you managing partner of the Atlanta office? I believe it was having consistent and sustained success on the business side for several years, in addition to serving in a number of different capacities where I have demonstrated strategic thinking related to the direction of the firm and its clients.

Throughout my time at the firm, I have always been intentional about getting out and meeting as many people as possible across the firm, regardless of office or location. You're not seeing the big picture if you remain within a bubble.

That has been my approach from Day One. I wanted to know what is important to the franchise partner in each office, and what's important to the litigation partner, even though most of the time I don't work closely with them. Ultimately,



Gerry Williams

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I believe that approach helped me get into this role—wanting input from as many different perspectives as possible.

What's the best piece of advice you can give to someone who wants to rise up the ranks to firm leadership? When I was an associate, three different partners at different firms told me I was a great lawyer, substantively, but that I had not developed the ability to take that knowledge

and display it in a confident way. I was naturally an introvert and always too nervous to get my message across. So eventually I had to stand up and say to myself, “You know what? You can’t hide in the shadows anymore.”

So as an associate, for six months, every day at the hours of 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., I did the exact same thing. I worked at a firm that had eight floors. I would leave my office and go to another floor, and I would speak to at least three people and engage in meaningful conversations. I spoke with everyone—partners, secretaries, associates, paralegals. I did that every day for more than six months. I found I was starting to do it naturally, and by the sixth month, I didn’t really have to think about it. What that taught me was that if you have an obstacle that is hindering your development, to tell yourself you can’t get past it is a lie. So, from that point on, I was no longer an introvert; I was becoming a leader.

Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you



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to managing partner? Joe Alexander (DLA Piper’s vice chairman) and I have been friends for more than 30 years. It’s always been a good collaborative relationship because he is someone I can bounce different ideas off and learn from. It was always helpful to get feedback from someone who knew me and was going to give it to me straight.

As a law firm leader, what impact would you like to have on your firm and/or the legal industry as a whole?

I think it’s very important for the legal industry to focus on [diversity and inclusion] initiatives, whether it’s ethnic diversity, gender diversity, etc. I look back and see a lot of progress, but there’s still work to be done. I’d like to help make a difference there as much as possible. A big part of that is asking the right questions—“Do you feel like you’re being supported?”—really listening to the answers, and then making things happen to the extent you have the ability to do so.