

NASABA Women & Law Section Breakfast Discussion Starter

Scenario

The partners of the law firm, Jones, White & O'Farrell are headed into the first round of decision meetings to name the next class of new partners at the firm. The closed door discussion ensues in their San Francisco Conference Room:

William White: Well, it's going to be a short discussion for us. It's clear that Bob and Henry are the two candidates who are partner quality for this firm. I have been mentoring them for years – we shot a round of golf last weekend to get a sense of their long-term commitment to the firm, and I'm ready to add them to our inner circle.

Oscar O'Farrell: Should we at least discuss the three other candidates who are on the slate for consideration this year? I think that Heather Marks would be a great candidate – she reminds me a lot of my daughter who is also up for partnership consideration at a firm in New York. And, then there is Ricky Ricardo who was up last year, but we just didn't have the right economics to consider adding him as a partner. And...don't forget about Manjula Gupta who has been here longer than anyone and does stellar work.

Jack Jones: Out of that list, I really wouldn't consider Heather or Manjula right now given what we are trying to do to grow the firm. The 2000+ hours we need junior partners to bill on top of establishing a base of new business is just not a fair burden to put on Manjula and Ricky who both have children and partners with equally demanding jobs. Maybe we should discuss Heather a bit more.

Oscar O'Farrell: I'm also a little concerned that Ricky won't build on the cohesiveness of the partnership group – he doesn't like to golf, his partner is not involved in our spouse events...And, Manjula, she does good work but I worry that her desire to take care of her elderly parents who live with her may prevent her from attending evening and weekend conferences and receptions which are necessary for effective rainmaking. I'm not really sure I know her well enough to be comfortable adding her to the partner roster. Let's consider Heather, Bob and Henry.

Jessica Africa – Sorry I'm late.

William White: I hereby move to add Bob, Henry and Heather to the new partner class.

Jessica Africa – What about Manjula Gupta? I have been mentoring her since I made partner, and I think she would contribute tremendously as a partner...her clients have nothing but positive feedback about her work.

In the Cafeteria

Manjula, Heather and Ricky are eagerly anticipating the partner decisions.

Manjula Gupta

What do you think is going to happen with partner decisions this year? Last year was so upsetting for me because I had been here longer than the others who were promoted to partner. But the good news is that Jessica has been a great mentor and advocate for me.

Ricky

If I don't make it this time around, I will seriously consider an in-house job or maybe even starting a solo practice. The hours are beginning to wear on me as the billing expectation for senior associates keeps climbing. I barely see my children anymore.

Heather

This is the first time I am being considered for partner. I'm wondering if I have a chance? I decided early in my career to postpone marriage and children so I could make it to the top.

Discussion Questions

Each group will be assigned one question for reporting.

1. What is the role of role mentors and advocates in career development?
2. What should Manjula do to develop her career?
3. What responsibility does the firm have in considering partner candidates?
4. What trade-offs are necessary in one's professional and personal life or is it possible to have it all?
5. What are pros and cons of various career opportunities for women in the law (large firm, small firm, in-house, solo, government, non-profit, consulting)?