

# Tips for making senior associate

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## Do you want to make senior associate?

In an increasingly competitive market, there is no right or wrong way to progress to the level of senior associate and there is no standard checklist of achievements that will guarantee that you achieve this goal.

Every firm is different and the career progression of its lawyers unique. However, most firms will promote the lawyers who are an asset to the practice. To ensure you stand out from the crowd there are several fundamental strategies you can adopt.

## Develop your legal skills – become an expert in your specialist practice area

It goes without saying that to qualify for promotion you must develop skills in your specialist area of practice. Accordingly, you should take every opportunity to learn and develop advisory, negotiation and drafting skills.

You should also develop particular expertise within your area of practice and make yourself invaluable to the firm. Learn as much as you can about a specific aspect of law that can affect the advice offered by your practice group. Market yourself internally as the “guru” on that subject; for example, the effects of GST and the latest ATO rulings as they apply to property matters.

Volunteer to participate in interesting new matters that will give you the experience you seek and promote your expertise to colleagues, clients and contacts.

Be commercial in your consideration of legal issues and the advice you provide and always deliver quality work.

## Raise your profile – internally and externally

In the legal profession, getting noticed is an important factor in raising your profile and advancing your career. Determine who needs to know about you and then work out how to make yourself known.

There are a number of ways to achieve this, both internally and within the legal profession at large:

- Social functions can be a great way to meet contacts in a relaxed environment.
- Present at internal and external firm seminars on your niche area – this can also contribute toward your CPD points.
- Attend client/business meetings, as these provide you with the opportunity to exchange information or ideas that are relevant to both parties.
- Join a professional association and attend the functions they promote. Industry conferences are perfect networking opportunities to promote your specialist skills and develop relationships with others with industry expertise. Identify people whom you would specifically like to meet at each event, such as possible clients, and follow up afterwards.
- Write articles and submit them to a legal or industry publication. Contribute to the firm or group client newsletter.

- Ensure your personal profile is kept up to date – this information is used on firm websites, in newsletters and in tenders.

## Internal marketing – be clear about what you want

Arrange a meeting with the head of your practice group. Think ahead about exactly what it is you want. Is it more responsibility, more work, greater contact with clients, exposure to different areas of practice? Think about how you will demonstrate your ability to rise to these challenges. Show your commitment and enthusiasm, gain recognition for your past experience, suggest marketing strategies for your firm, raise ideas for retaining lawyers and increasing efficiency, pass on positive feedback from clients.



You may choose to prepare a summary of the discussion for the practice group head or provide further information if the need arises. If this is not necessary, a follow-up email will demonstrate your ambition and commitment to progressing your career.

## Relationships – colleagues, clients and contacts

Use your contacts. Develop professional relationships with the contacts you meet at seminars or functions. You can do this by calling to seek advice or comment on a particular point of law or by arranging a face-to-face meeting, perhaps over coffee.

Know your clients. Focus on how you can add value to their decision-making process rather than on what you have to sell. Ask questions. What are their expectations? What is their preferred method of communication? What information or advice would be of most benefit to them?

Find a mentor. Think about a partner or senior associate at your firm with whom you would feel comfortable discussing your career progression. Catch up regularly to discuss issues or questions that you may have.

Mentor and supervise others. Leadership and the ability to motivate a team are important skills for an aspiring senior associate to learn.

## Financially – the budget

Finally, monitor your financial performance – make sure you are achieving budget. Demonstrate your interest in the commercial success of the firm as a whole by tracking your own financial contribution.

Hard work, strong financial performance and demonstrated ability to build client relationships all contribute significantly to making the move towards appointment as a senior associate. Good luck!

