

PUBLICATION

Common Ground

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Chris Biller: I have been an associate at Baker Donelson's Nashville office for one year, and in that time, I have had the opportunity to both meet and work with many individuals from different walks of life. I recently became acquainted with Emma Redden, who has been with Baker Donelson's Memphis office for nine years and was recently elevated to shareholder. Emma and I share a common similarity: we have both dealt with a substantial amount of change this past year. I have been navigating the transition from law student to first-year practicing attorney, while Emma has been balancing the new responsibilities and expectations that come with the position of shareholder. Together, we discussed our similar experiences of change.

Chris: Starting any new role can be a big change, particularly in a big law firm. What is the biggest change in responsibilities that you have experienced transitioning from associate to shareholder?

Emma: I feel as though my decisions have a bigger immediate effect on clients. I have less oversight, which creates more pressure to be accurate and maintain client relationships. The benefit of this, though, is that it is very rewarding and has made me a better attorney.

Chris: I like how you mentioned the rewarding aspect of your new role. Similar to your experience, I have to be aware of how my actions have real-world consequences now. At a big firm, all my actions affect other people, whether that be co-workers or clients. As opposed to when I was a student, the only person really affected by my actions was myself. This can cause more pressure to do well, and potentially be more stressful; however, it is also much more motivating and rewarding.

Emma: Change can be stressful, and working at a law firm comes with a fair share of pressure. On that topic, what has been the biggest difficulty you've experienced in the transition from student to associate?

Chris: Imposter syndrome! Particularly my first few months in the new position I questioned whether I was good or smart enough for this job. However, the longer I have been here, the more comfortable and confident I have gotten with my work and skills.

Emma: I hate to say it, but the imposter syndrome remains even when you become a shareholder. I always joke that by the time we feel like we know what we're doing, it's time to retire. Very often in my new role, I find myself thinking "Shouldn't someone be checking up on me?" I think that over time you gain confidence and learn that you are fully capable of doing the work that this firm and clients trust us to do. And I still rely on my mentors and other attorneys that I work with, even

shareholders who have the same level of experience as me. There is no pride here, and the most important thing is to make sure that the client receives our best work.

Chris: You mentioned mentorships. Would you say that having reliable mentors has helped you overcome imposter syndrome and any other challenges you have faced in your new role?

Emma: Definitely. Mentors are a safe space to discuss worries before they have a real effect on a client. Mentors are there to tell you what their experience is, and it is usually someone who has been through that experience before. Friendships at work are also very important. Being able to share personal matters in a safe and confidential space is very helpful and reassuring.

Chris: I completely agree that relationships in the Firm have been integral to my success and overcoming imposter syndrome. I've been very impressed with the support system I've had here at Baker Donelson. There are many shareholders I feel comfortable going to for advice or wisdom on a matter. In addition, I have become great friends with many of my fellow associates. I am often reminded that we are all in the same boat and learning new things every day. Having such great relationships is very encouraging and makes work much more enjoyable.

Emma: My favorite thing about Baker Donelson is 100 percent the friendships I have made.

Based on what you've learned in your transition to an associate, what advice would you have for new associates in their first year?

Chris: Make use of firm resources and the wealth of knowledge that our employees possess. Additionally, try to get to a point in your personal life where the activities and relationships you are involved in are all energizing you and making you happy. I've noticed that the more content I am with my life and well-being, the better my work product is.

What advice would you have for associates transitioning to partner or shareholder?

Emma: I would say don't have the mindset of, "Oh I've made it and I know everything now." I think that it is important to understand that you are in a new transition, and you need to still be open to things. Say yes to work, say yes to new people, and even say yes to learning new areas of the law. Networking, both internally and externally, is also important. Understand that you still have support. You are not on your own as a shareholder, and it is okay to ask for advice or help when you need it.

Chris: Emma and I have many differences, including our sex, gender identity, age, background, family structure, office, practice area, and professional status. However, during our conversation, we learned that we have many similarities. We both love traveling (particularly the planning stage of a trip), reading out on our balconies, and being with our animals (Emma has a Golden Retriever named Buzz, and I have a cat named Yzma). In addition, we have both shared a common experience this past year: change. Our conversation

emphasized that while change is inevitable, surrounding yourself with positive relationships can turn any stressful change into a very rewarding experience.