

How I Made Partner: Orrick's Emily Tabatabai

The career path of this cybersecurity lawyer was unconventional, and she advanced at her own pace.

By ALM Staff

Emily Tabatabai, 39, Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe

Offices: Houston and Washington D.C.

Practice area: Cyber, privacy and data innovation.

Law school: University of Virginia School of Law, 2006.

Number of years at the firm: 12 (Orrick "lifer").

How long were you an associate or counsel at the firm? Nine years as an associate; two years as of counsel.

What year did you make partner at your current firm? 2018.

What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in making you partner? My path to partnership was quite unconventional, and I advanced at my own pace. Though I've been with the firm since I was a summer associate, I haven't always followed the typical "partner track" route. I worked on a flexible schedule (anywhere from 60 percent to 85 percent) for several years while my children were young. When I relocated with my family to Texas seven years

ago, the firm supported my working entirely remotely. (Today the firm has two offices in Texas). I was promoted to of counsel four years later, while still working remotely on a reduced hour schedule, and then to partner two years after that.

After all of that, I'm still somewhat amazed to find myself here today as a partner. It certainly helps that I have deep subject matter expertise in a specialized area of law that impacts almost all of our firm's clients. Because of that reach, I have had the opportunity to collaborate and build relationships with dozens of partners across virtually all of our offices and practice groups.

What's more, I think the firm recognized and valued my drive to take ownership over my practice and develop new expertise in burgeoning industries, technologies and areas of law. I began focusing on data privacy matters more than a decade ago, when there were few practitioners in the field and even fewer firms with privacy-focused practice groups. With the firm's support, I co-founded our U.S. data privacy practice that



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grew into our globally recognized Cyber, Privacy and Data Innovation team.

Describe how you feel about your career now that you've made partner. I'm incredibly fortunate to work in an area on the cutting edge of today's technological explosion, and one that is undergoing rapid legal and regulatory transformation. It's a privilege to help our clients navigate these changes—and only more so as a partner. At the same time, I'm grateful to Orrick for the firm's

unwavering support and for providing the flexibility I needed to grow my career at a pace that worked for me.

What's the key to successful business development in your opinion? Be an expert in a topic that interests you, and push yourself to keep learning. Always think about what's coming next and how you can help your clients see around corners. Share your knowledge by writing, speaking and just getting out and having conversations with people in your industry. Start early. You're never too young to demonstrate your inquisitiveness, enthusiasm and ability to think critically about issues. Build relationships. Seek out lawyers, academics, business folks and other professionals in your field. You'll be amazed at what a powerful network you develop over time—and how much fun it is.

Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to partner? Please provide name, job title and a brief explanation. I have been fortunate to work with many fantastic colleagues who have mentored and supported me throughout my career, but two Orrick partners stand out in helping to shape my career. Garret Rasmussen, partner in the antitrust group, encouraged me to develop my expertise in privacy law and pushed me to take ownership



of my career trajectory when I was just a junior associate. I wouldn't be here today without Tony Kim, partner in cyber, privacy and data innovation practice, who has been my constant collaborator, mentor, champion, partner and friend.

What's the best piece of advice you could give an associate who wants to make partner? Find your "thing" and become an expert. Become indispensable. Seek out great mentors and work with people you enjoy and respect. Most importantly, never be afraid to ask for what you need. We work in a tough industry with clients who demand excellence at all times. It's unfortunate, though not at all surprising, how many talented associates leave law firm life when the challenge of maintaining a break-neck pace becomes unsustainable.

I always encourage associates to remember that situations change and that your career is a marathon and not a sprint. Before you close a door, think about whether there are any changes you can make—even temporarily—that could help strike the balance you need at that time in your life. Be honest with yourself and your colleagues about what you need to be successful in your career, and don't be afraid to chart an unconventional path.

