

# How I Made Partner: 'Give Every Assignment Your Full Attention,' Says Nicholas Maxwell of Cohen Ziffer Frenchman & McKenna

By ALM Staff

April 24, 2024

**Nicholas Maxwell, 41, Partner at Cohen Ziffer Frenchman & McKenna, New York City**

**Practice area:** Policyholder-side insurance recovery

**Law school and year of graduation:** University of Texas School of Law, 2011

*The following has been edited for style.*

**How long have you been at the firm?**

Three years

**What was your criteria in selecting your current firm?**

Having practiced in the insurance recovery space for several years before joining Cohen Ziffer Frenchman & McKenna, I knew what I was looking for: A firm that does not shy away from complex, high-stakes, high-dollar litigations and can go toe-to-toe with the biggest and best insurer-side firms. I was also looking for the collegiality of a boutique, but with the reputation and manpower needed to attract large corporate policyholders across various industries. It was clear to me as a potential lateral that that is what Cohen Ziffer offers. And the excitement of coming in on the ground floor at a brand new, woman-led firm (we opened our doors a month before I joined) was an added bonus.

What I didn't realize until joining the firm was how it achieves this consistent success. We have a true "work hard play hard" mentality and a sincere commitment to every single case. Even though the firm was fully remote at the time I joined, I quickly got to know my new colleagues and found my way into substantive roles on interesting matters. Cohen



Courtesy photo

**Nicholas R. Maxwell of Cohen Ziffer Frenchman & McKenna.**

Ziffer is on the up and up, and it's exciting to be part of that.

**Were you an associate at another firm before joining your present firm? If so, which one and how long were you there?**

I spent nine years with Anderson Kill in New York and Philadelphia before making the transition to Cohen Ziffer.

**What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in making you partner? Was it your performance on a specific case? A personality trait? Making connections with the right people?**

The Cohen Ziffer partnership is a small, tightknit group, many of whom have been working together for over 20 years. Over time I showed the partners that I can be trusted to steer some of the firm's largest

matters—from early fact development all the way up to trial, managing client relationships and internal resources along the way. At a small, busy firm like ours, the best thing you can do is convince a senior partner that they can delegate clients to you and know that they will be in good hands.

**Who had or has the greatest influence in your career and why?**

Despite only having been with the firm for three years, I have worked extensively with three of our senior partners, Robin Cohen, Ken Frenchman, and Adam Ziffer. All three are excellent attorneys with unique styles. Together, they have taught (and continue to teach) me that being a successful litigator is about much more than just finding the right case cite. It's about ensuring that every decision you make—no matter how minor or early in the case—fits into a well-defined theory of the case that you will carry all the way through trial. But most importantly, Robin, Ken and Adam clearly enjoy practicing law together in the insurance recovery space, and that attitude is infectious.

**What advice would you give an associate who wants to make partner?**

Give every assignment your full attention, no matter who assigned it to you and how big the case is. Take the time to think strategically about your cases and don't be afraid to offer your input to the partners you are working with—the feedback you receive will make you a better lawyer. On large cases, you will often know the details better than anyone else, making your insight much more valuable than you might originally assume.

**When it comes to career planning and navigating inside a law firm, in your opinion, what's the most common mistake you see other attorneys making?**

Lack of initiative. If you identify a core of colleagues you enjoy working with, let them know. If there is a particular substantive area that interests you, write

an article about it. If you hear the firm has an interesting new matter, research the client online, build some background knowledge on the matter, and before long you will be the expert on a matter you haven't even been assigned yet.

**What challenges, if any, did you face or had to overcome in your career path and what was the lesson learned? How did it affect or influence your career?**

I came into the New York City job market in 2011, when firms were cutting salaries, deferring associate classes, etc. I had no 2L summer firm to return to and no professional network in NYC. During my 3L spring semester, I sent snail mail packages with my materials to nearly 100 small firms, and eventually a small employment law firm, Pelton Graham, hired me on an hourly basis. I spent six months there getting my bearings (and finding an apartment), transitioned to my first insurance recovery position in 2012, and 12 years later I couldn't be happier with where my career has led me.

That first job hunt taught me early on that my career wasn't going to follow the easy, natural trajectory I had originally thought it would. Young lawyers all start as small fish in a big pond, but if you can leave your comfort zone and identify your unique strengths as a lawyer, you will stand out and—eventually—land in the right place.

**How would you describe your work mindset?**

The world of litigation is inherently adversarial. When I am up against multinational insurers with competent, well-resourced counsel, chasing down 98% of the facts and law isn't enough. Your adversary's entire job is to find the other 2%, to turn over the one stone you didn't—and in most cases they will eventually find it. It sounds cliché, but litigation really is a chess game. I try to always be inside my adversary's head, anticipating their next move, so that I can close off that avenue before they even think to pursue it.