



*The Women's Bar Association  
of the State of New York*

*presents*

*Convention 2026  
Continuing Legal Education Series*

**Establishing, Operating, Growing, and  
Thriving Through Law Partnerships**

May 30, 2026  
1:30 pm - 3:00 pm

Presenters: D. Jenny Kim, Esq.  
Megan Rha, Esq.

# Establishing, Operating, Growing, and Thriving Through Law Partnerships

May 30, 2026

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Rha Kim Grossman & McIlwain, LLP

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## Two are better than one

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“The strength of a business partnership lies in the ability to adapt, innovate, and evolve together.” -Anonymous-

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“The best partnerships come from people who have their own interests and talents, yet actively understand, remember, and appreciate each other’s interests and talents.” -Heidi Reeder, author-

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“A friendship founded on a business is better than a business founded on friendship.” -John D. Rockefeller-

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“It takes two flints to make a fire.” -Louisa May Alcott-

# Most Partnerships Terminate Within Several Years



Loyalty Issues  
& Territorial  
Tensions



Personality &  
Leadership  
Clashes

Business is  
a mess!

Work Hour &  
Style Issues

Communication  
Issues &  
Misunderstandings

Money Issues  
- funding, earning,  
distributions

# A Real Life Example of a Partnership Break Up

## THE VALUATION OF THE PARTNERSHIP

(or the Battle of the Experts)

[Levine v Platzer, Swergold, Levine, Goldberg, Katz & Jaslow, LLP](#)

2025 NY Slip Op 34050(U) • October 17, 2025

Supreme Court, New York County

Docket Number: Index No. 652616/2021

**Judge: Jennifer G. Schecter**



# THE STORY OF OUR LAW PARTNERSHIP

2007-  
Shall we  
partner?  
Why not?

Lawyering,  
Growing,  
Mothering



Taking Risks  
Hiring & Firing  
International &  
Interstate



A Brief Third Partner,  
Diversification of Cases  
& Other Valuable  
Lessons



Growing  
Through the  
Zombie Days of  
COVID 19



- New Partners
- New Headquarter
- New Areas of Concentration



# Remembering the Why and How of the Genesis of the Partnership Strengthens the Partnership

**01** Appreciate what brought us together

**02** Affirm what keeps us together

**03** Resist comparing and remind myself why I need my partner

**04** Celebrate how we are better together

# Strategies & Best Practices



# Level of Motivation, Urgency, and Hunger

## Shared Motivation

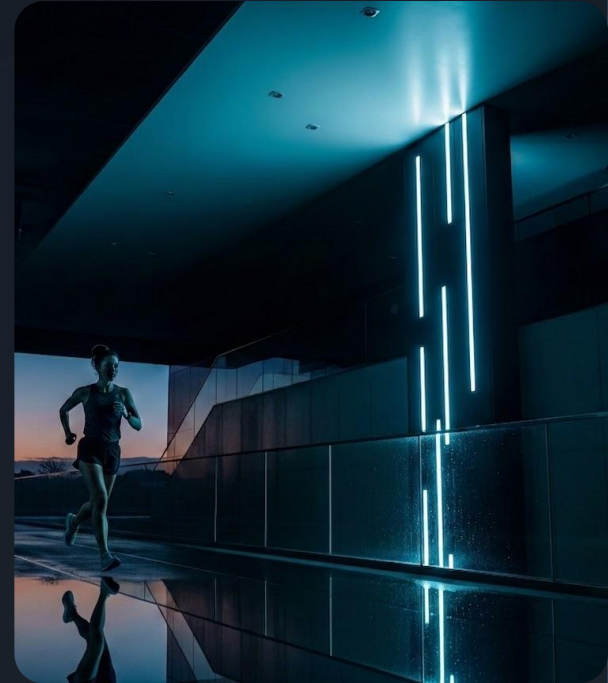
Driven by the same short and long-term vision  
Financial, self-fulfillment, legacy, status, doing good

## Urgency

Partnership as the main source of income for all partners (priority)  
How much, how soon, until when  
What keeps the partners up at night?

## Growth Hunger

Similar level of desire for new opportunities and growth,  
and the willingness to work to achieve them



# Financial & Business Alignment

## Capital Contributions & Ongoing Financial Responsibilities

Must agree on initial funding and ongoing funding requirements

## Profit Distribution

Must agree on how to share revenue, calculate origination credits, manage distributions

## Risk Management & Debt

Must agree on the acceptable level of risks & how to handle liabilities and debt



# Firm Operations, Culture & Conflict

## Roles & Decision Making

Agree on how and who will manage what

Agree on how decisions will be made and when they need to be made

## Firm Culture & Core Values

Agree on the firm's priorities and style, standards and practices, and the office environment

Agree on how policies will be developed and enforced

Agree on how the partners will interact with office staff and employees

## Conflict Planning

Agree on procedures for resolving disputes among partners, staff, and with clients

Agree on procedure for complaints about the partners by employees, clients, other attorneys

# Strategies & Best Practices Continued



# Communication & Decision Making

## Regularly-Scheduled and Intentional Communication

Frequent, transparent communication about goals, current condition, potential issues, and challenging situations

## Decision-Making Protocols Before Decisions Have to be Made

Voting process, management decisions, what to decide, when to decide, and by whom  
Documented governance procedure

## Conflict Resolution Procedures BEFORE Conflicts Arise

Agree on procedures for internal disputes and outside complaints  
Imagine the most awkward scenarios and agree on ways to address them

# Roles, Strengths, & Leadership Style



## Consider the Role of Each Partner - Distinct and Shared

Specific and general operational functions, day-to-day responsibilities, the natural tendencies of each partner

Management- Development-Lawyering

## Leverage Individual Partner's Strengths

Complementary skills and talents to build the firm and its practice areas

Interests and background to create niches and communities

When done well- each partner can enable the other partner to delve deeper and explore wider

## Understand Each Partner's Leadership Style

Study each other's interactions and relationship style. Learn from each other's leadership style

Encourage each other to develop leadership style that reinforces the firm's culture and core values

Lastly, lawyer  
partnerships are  
**RELATIONSHIPS,**  
and that means we  
got to work at them



# The Non-Negotiables of Successful Law Partnerships

## Intentionally and Thoughtfully Prioritize the Partner Relationship

Partners must be convinced that “two are better than one”

Recognize the ebb and flow of partnership relationships and the practice of law

Value the strength and stamina that a partnership can bring to a law practice, and protect the partnership relationship

## Trust is Built Over Time but it can be Destroyed in a Moment

The crack of mistrust should be identified, even if painful to admit, and dealt with swiftly

Trust is built on day-to-day decisions- to be transparent, honest, reliable, considerate, and humble

***"Lawyer partnerships are RELATIONSHIPS, and that means we have to work at them."***



# Entrepreneurship & the Practice of Law

Effective Partnerships Help Us Do Both Well

The risk-taking nature of operating and growing a business versus the risk-averse and serious nature of lawyering

# Entrepreneurship & the Practice of Law

Effective Partnerships Enable Excellence in Both Roles



The freedom to fear, wonder, dream, investigate - TOGETHER



The positive, energized default voice - TOGETHER



Amassing opportunities - TOGETHER



Leap, flop, fly, launch again - TOGETHER

# Questions & Comments

## Thank You for Your Participation!

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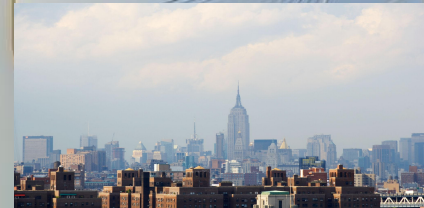
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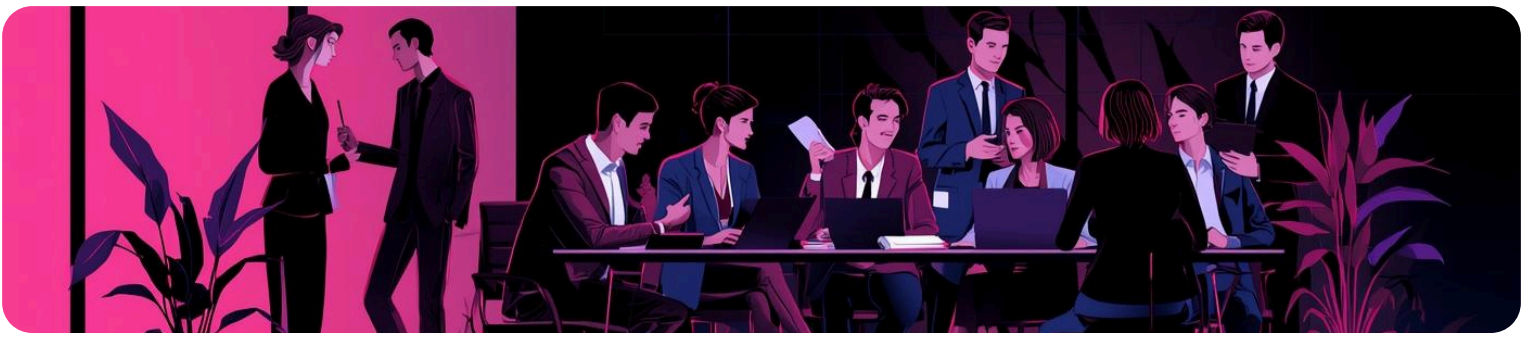
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# Long-Lasting Attorney Partnerships - Strategies and Best Practices

*Rha Kim Grossman & McIlwain, LLP*

## I. Before Partnership Checklist

### Level of Motivation and Hunger

- What motivates each partner to start or stay in this business?
- How much does each partner need to earn to make this a viable source of income for them?
- Is this business/partnership each partner's main source of income?
- How many days per week and hours per day is each partner willing to invest in this partnership, and will that time be compensated separately from profits?
- What life stage is each partner in (their commitments and responsibilities outside of the partnership)?
- How important is the success of this partnership/business to each partner?

### Financial & Business Alignment

- Have we agreed on capital contributions and ongoing financial responsibilities?
- What are our expectations regarding earnings, profit-sharing, and distributions?
- Do we agree on how budgets and expenses will be handled?
- Are we aligned on how we want to grow our business and reinvest profits?
- How will we keep our finances transparent? Will we share regular financial updates?

### Firm Operations & Culture

- What is our vision and mission for the firm?
- What do we envision for firm culture and values (teamwork, client service, ethics)?
- How open are we to technological adoption and innovation?
- How will we recruit talent, retain employees, and provide for professional development?
- How will we develop new practice areas?
- How much time will each partner spend developing new opportunities?
- How much time will each partner spend working on cases?
- How will the firm's policies be developed? Who will enforce them and how?
- What are our policies regarding hiring friends and family members?
- What are our policies regarding taking on the cases of friends and family members?
- How will we handle disputes or complaints by clients?

### Communication and Decision-Making

- Have we set ground rules for regular communication (meetings, updates, conflict resolution)?
- Do we have a process for major strategic decisions (unanimous vs. majority vote)?
- Have we clarified how to handle disagreements and avoid misunderstandings?
- Is there a documented governance structure (managing partner role, committees, responsibilities)?

### Roles, Strength & Leadership Styles

- Do we have complementary skills, talents, and practice areas that add value?
- Have we assessed potential clashes in leadership styles or personalities?
- How can we acknowledge and respect each partner's role and autonomy?
- Have we identified who handles management vs. client development vs. lawyering?

### Relationship Building & Trust

- How can we regularly affirm and appreciate each other's contributions?
- Can we listen and let others take the lead when needed?
- How can we share the heavy load (financial, client, admin)?
- How can we practice our commitment to loyalty and trust and avoid territorialism?
- What ways can we celebrate successes and revisit why we are partners?

### Contingency & Conflict Planning

- Have we created a written partnership agreement covering withdrawals, dissolution, and disputes?
- Are we clear on dispute resolution mechanisms (mediation, arbitration, court)?
- Do we have a plan for unexpected events (illness, death, misconduct)?
- Do we have a buy-sell or exit agreement in place?

## II. During Partnership Checklist

### Relationship Building

- Do we allow space for each other to speak and actively listen?
- Have we established mutual appreciation and a shared vision?
- How are we dividing and managing heavy workloads?
- Have we clarified how to handle disagreements and avoid misunderstandings?
- Do we have mutual loyalty and trust, while avoiding territorialism?
- Do we celebrate successes and remind ourselves why we are partners?

### Maximizing Strengths, Differences & Complementarity

- What responsibilities does my partner handle that relieve me of certain tasks?
- What concerns does my partner manage so I don't have to?
- What opportunities do I have because of my partner?
- What brought us together in the first place?
- What unique skills, perspectives, or talents does my partner have that I do not?




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