

How I Made Office Co-Managing Partner: 'I Had Grit and Resolve and Quickly Overcame Cultural, Educational, and Language Barriers,' Says Ejim Peter Achi of Greenberg Traurig

"I realized that my grit and resolve were two of the essential traits I had deployed over time to achieve these and other important life goals."

By Tasha Norman

Ejim Peter Achi, 38, Greenberg Traurig

Title: Co-managing partner of Greenberg Traurig's New York office and co-chairman of the firm's New York corporate practice.

Law school and year of graduation: University of Pennsylvania Law School, 2006.

How long have you been at the firm? Four years.

What's the biggest surprise you experienced in becoming office managing partner? The biggest surprise was the large number of important issues that I am asked to weigh in on every day. I always try to break these critical decisions down by first asking: What is at stake? Ultimately, I have a team that I trust, so I am comfortable delegating tasks as appropriate. My advantage is that the office was functioning beautifully before I came to the position, so I am building on a good foundation.

What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in promoting you to office managing partner?

At Greenberg Traurig, we always say that those who are most successful here have grit. I believe I have that trait and it is one of the things the firm recognized in selecting me for the position. I immigrated from Nigeria to the United States with my family when I was 13 and worked hard to quickly overcome cultural, educational and language barriers. As I succeeded in the legal industry and in the private equity/mergers and acquisition space, I realized that my grit and resolve were two of the essential traits I had deployed over time to achieve these and other important life goals.

In addition, it's probably fair to view the skills that an effective M&A lawyer needs to cultivate—dedicated client service, the exercise of good judgment, sound project



Ejim Peter Achi

courtesy photo

management, strategic thinking, and grounded decision-making—as some of the skills one needs to be an effective managing shareholder.

What's the key to successful business development in your opinion? The key is that you must demonstrate the ability to help the potential client solve problems. This is typically described as “adding value.” To do this, you have to know what their objectives are and how to assist them in achieving those objectives. Ask yourself: What is the client trying to accomplish and how

can I help them succeed? How can I provide value to them beyond my role as a legal adviser?

What's the best advice you could give a partner who wants to elevate to firm leadership? Focus on the primary—and very important—job you have, which is client service. Try to be the best lawyer you can be for your clients rather than being preoccupied with having a leadership position in the firm. When you put clients first and do great work, everything else follows. At Greenberg Traurig, we recognize those attorneys who operate that way and seek them out for leadership positions.

What's been the biggest change, day-to-day, in your routine since becoming office managing partner? The biggest change I have experienced is the need to allocate and schedule more structured time on my calendar for office management matters. I am a big believer in using your calendar to make sure things get done: if you don't schedule it, it likely won't happen. We have daily office management calls which we usually do in the morning and follow-up actions that result from those calls. So my schedule is now



Credit: Shutterstock.com

structured even earlier than before to accommodate that extra time.

Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to office managing partner? Richard A. Rosenbaum, executive chairman of Greenberg Traurig, has had the most significant influence in my rise to office managing partner. He is great at identifying talent, inspiring confidence, and helping people perform at a high level because of the way he engages with them. I still remember one of the things he said to me when I was interviewing at Greenberg Traurig: "I see something in you." At the time, I thought to myself that if he believes I can do well at this global firm, then I believe I can do

it. So I made sure I delivered on that confidence he had in me. He has the quality of a superior coach who can inspire talented players to perform up to their potential, and ever since I arrived at Greenberg Traurig, he has invested the time to encourage and inspire me.

Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give to yourself and/or what would you do differently. My advice to my younger self would really be more of a pep talk. I would encourage my younger self to keep doing what I was already doing: continue to work hard, continue to learn; take calculated and informed risks, and always bet on yourself.