

# How I Made Office Managing Partner: 'Set Your Priorities, Then Stick to Them,' Says Tony Barkow of Jenner & Block

By ALM Staff

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**Anthony (Tony) Barkow**, Office Managing Partner at Jenner & Block, New York, New York

**Practice area:** Co-chair, investigations, compliance and defense

**Law school and year of graduation:** Harvard Law School, 1995

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

Twelve years. I was also a summer associate at the firm's Washington, D.C., office.

**What year were you elected or promoted to your current role?**

I was appointed office managing partner in April 2022.

**Were you a partner at another firm before joining your present firm? If so, which one, how long were you there and when did you leave?**

I began my career clerking for a judge in the Southern District of New York. I then spent two years as an Honors Program attorney at the US Department of Justice Office of Consumer Litigation, followed by four years at the US Attorney's Office in Washington, D.C., where I worked as a prosecutor in federal and local court. After that, I spent six years at the US Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, primarily prosecuting terrorism cases and securities fraud.



Courtesy photo

## Anthony Barkow of Jenner & Block

In 2008, I started a nonprofit at the NYU School of Law, currently named the Peter L. Zimroth Center on the Administration of Criminal Law. I learned a lot being a prosecutor, and I wanted to use that knowledge to try to improve the administration of the criminal justice system.

Starting a nonprofit was a non-traditional move from the US Attorney's Office, but it was a continuation of my public service work, just in a different way. After serving as the Center's executive director for four years, I came to Jenner, which is the first and only law firm I've worked at (other than as a summer associate). I've now been at Jenner for longer than I was in government, and it has been an extremely rewarding experience.

**How would you describe your career trajectory (was it organic or an active pursuit)?**

My trajectory overall was an active pursuit; I wanted to be a prosecutor and do a lot of trials, then I wanted to prosecute and try the biggest cases. My journey to Jenner, however, was organic as I never expected to end up at a law firm. Post-clerkship, I went to the government and then founded the nonprofit—altogether, those experiences spanned the first 17 years of my legal career. After I had run the nonprofit for several years and decided to move on, I considered returning to government as well as in-house and law firm opportunities. Jenner quickly stood out as the right place for me to go.

In addition to the fact that our firm has an elite investigations practice, so is (and was already at the time I joined) excellent in my area of practice, I appreciated the values-centered culture and long history of making a difference for both clients and the broader community. At Jenner, we have an unparalleled pro bono commitment that's part of the firm's DNA—we've been ranked the No. 1 law firm for pro bono in the United States 10 times and twice internationally by *The American Lawyer*. It's one of the main things that drew me here, and that public spiritedness attracts interesting people to work and stay here.

**What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in electing/promoting you to your current role? Was it your performance on a specific case? A personality trait? Making connections with the right people?**

One factor was tenure. I've been in Jenner's New York office for 12 years of its soon-to-be 20-year existence. My leadership style also made me a good fit for the role. I'm very much a team-oriented institutionalist. Part of that is simply my personality, and another part is my background. Both government and non-

profit settings tend to foster a reflexive focus on teamwork.

**What unique challenges do you face as it relates to your role?**

When I stepped into the office managing partner role in 2022, the return to office after COVID-19 closures was a significant issue, and it still is. The market is coalescing around new workforce practices, and we are no exception to that. Because of all the positive things associated with being in the office—like mentoring, training, connections, and friendship—we have instituted a hybrid schedule with “collaboration days” at Jenner. To get people to look forward to being in the office, we focus on a collective commitment to collaboration, schedule firm and cohort meetings, and share meals and socialize on our days together. We all want to have purpose for being in the office, not just to check a box on attendance, so we're intentional regarding how we use our days.

For some of our junior lawyers, working at Jenner is their very first in-office experience because their entire legal education and summer associate positions were remote. Moving from law school to a firm and starting a new job is already a big challenge, even without the added difficulty caused by the pandemic. We specifically designed several of our collaboration-day events to cultivate good experiences. For example, I established a lunch exclusively for first-, second-, and third-year associates so that they have an opportunity to get to know each other, talk about things that concern or excite them, and make the connections that will help them through the rest of their lives.

**What's the best piece of advice you give to someone who wants to rise up the ranks to lead an office?**

If you want to lead an office (or be any type of leader at a firm), it's important to be an

institutionalist. You need to be positive, constructive, and not cliquish. You need to put the firm and collective first, even before yourself and your individual interests. You need to fully integrate yourself across different groups so that you can lead a true collective institution where everyone is striving together.

**Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to your current role?**

Early in my tenure at the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia, Robert Spagnoletti was my supervisor. He later became D.C.'s first attorney general and is currently chief executive officer of the D.C. bar. Bob is a brilliant and talented lawyer and an organizational and management genius, but he is also a force of nature in terms of his positivity. Working as a very junior assistant U.S. attorney in the D.C. Superior Court is chaotic and often requires problem-solving on the fly. Whenever anyone would call Bob for guidance, he'd say, "Wait! First question: Are you having fun?" And then he'd give immediate, sophisticated, and practical advice. Bob is relentlessly positive, which makes him a fantastic leader.

Katya Jestin, the firm's co-managing partner (and fellow co-chair of the investigations, compliance and defense practice) who sits in New York, has also been deeply influential in my career. We met briefly when we were both federal prosecutors and then again when I interviewed to join Jenner. We were at similar stages in life and have similar career paths and personalities and values, so we immediately hit it off. She's a close friend as well as a wonderful lawyer and colleague, and she mentored me on the transition to private practice upon my arrival. Katya has played a significant role in my success as well as in the success of the firm overall.

**How do you utilize technology to benefit the firm/practice and/or business development?**

We're going to see continued pressure on law firms to streamline tasks with modern technology. At Jenner, we stay abreast of the latest innovations and have policies in place to ensure we deploy powerful new technologies ethically and responsibly, while also delivering efficiency and cost savings for clients. We continually review and evaluate generative AI tools and closely monitor developments in this area. We're also focused on the impact of AI on clients, and our AI Task Force regularly provides counsel and legal support at the forefront of this technology and at the intersection of law, business, and policy.

**Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give to your younger self and/or what would you do differently?**

Much of the professional success I've achieved has had some connection to a person who mentored me, taught me how to do something, or worked with (or across from) me. In many ways, the most important aspect of your career is the relationships that you forge along the way. I'm a social person who likes to keep in touch with people, so I was fortunate to foster those relationships without deliberately setting out to do so. Knowing what I know now though, I would advise my younger self to be more purposeful about making and tending to those valuable connections.

**Do you have a prediction on how the legal industry will evolve over the next several years?**

There is intense competition among law firms for talent, for clients, and for work. At the same time, market forces are shifting clients' expectations. On top of those factors, new workplace norms are emerging as firms address the return to office and intergenerational views on work-life balance.

Jenner is ideally situated to navigate these issues. First and foremost, we provide legal services at the highest level. We don't do everything, but we are excellent at what we do. The firm has been adapting and evolving for over a century while remaining true to its core values. And the New York office is positioned to do the same in our market because we're an office stocked with talent and committed to our clients, each other and our culture.

**Please share with us any firm or industry initiatives that you are working on as well as the impact you hope to achieve.**

As Jenner's New York office evolves, we're excited to continue to deepen our roots and presence in the market. We draw on the strengths of the firm's 110-year history, and our long-term relationships in New York reflect that.

We've been successful by focusing on our core strengths—litigation, investigations, government strategy, and media and entertainment; applying these competencies to cutting-edge and growing areas of law such as post-Dobbs, National Security, AI, and Congressional Investigations; and focusing on broadening our capabilities for clients operating in industries where we have deep experience and where there is demand, including expanding our transactional capabilities.

One of our partners, Susan Kohlmann, was selected as the 70th president of the NYC Bar Association, which is an example of our deep commitment to the industry and to the city. We have fantastic lawyers in New York who handle our clients' most sensitive and important matters; we have homegrown talent, including now-partners (and firm leaders) who started at the firm as junior associates, and even current team

members who started in the New York office on the very first days it was open; and we have grown strategically to bring on incredible talent over the years in all of our key practice areas.

**What career advice do you wish more people would ask you? (e.g., "if you just listened to me you could have...")**

It's important to balance life and work, and my family is of utmost importance to me. Our son is 17, and I've had dinner with him most nights his entire life. I've worked hard and achieved professional success, but prioritizing my family is the foundation on which all of that is built. With the benefit of hindsight, it was undoubtedly the right decision, and that's the advice I would give to lawyers just starting out in their legal careers: set your priorities, then stick to them, and you will succeed across the board and be a happy, fulfilled person.

**As a law firm leader, what impact would you like to have on your firm and/or the legal industry as a whole?**

I believe all people have an obligation to try make the world a better place, and as lawyers, we have a particular duty and ability to do that. As a prosecutor, I enforced the rule of law and represented the rights of victims and communities, and I'm proud of that. The nonprofit I started continues to work to improve the administration of the criminal justice system and the exercise of prosecutorial power and prosecutorial decision-making. My incredible colleagues at Jenner & Block, and particularly in our New York office, share this commitment. We do cutting-edge legal work for our clients and simultaneously strive to leave behind positive legacies. I'm excited about the future and what we will accomplish together.