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How I Made Law Firm Leadership: 'Do It for the Right Reasons,' Says Timothy Foden of Boies Schiller

By Law.com Staff
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Timothy Foden, 46, Partner at Boies Schiller Flexner, London, England, United Kingdom

Job title: Co-head of the international arbitration group; member of firmwide executive committee

Practice area: International arbitration

Law school and year of graduation: American University Washington College of Law, 2005

The following has been edited for style.

How long have you been at the firm?

Four years, three months

How long were you a partner at the firm before being promoted to firm leadership?

I had been at Boies Schiller a little over three and a half years when the opportunity to run for a seat on the executive committee arose. The firm used an extended process to select a new ExComm member, and I was elected by the partnership to the committee in June.

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 was a partner at LALIVE beginning in 2017 and founded their London office before joining Boies Schiller in 2022.



Courtesy photo

Timothy L. Foden of Boies Schiller.

I came here because I saw a unique opportunity to both help rebuild the London office after significant departures and to build an international arbitration practice group with a trial lawyer mentality. Where better to do that than a leading trial law firm founded by David Boies and Jonathan Schiller?

What year were you promoted to your current position?

2026

Were there any surprises you faced after becoming a leader at the firm?

I was surprised by how much a big deal some of my partners and our associates made out of the election result. I was excited, but I put my hand up for the election process simply because I thought I had something to contribute to the firm's direction and I could bring an international perspective to firm leadership. After putting my hand up, I really didn't

think about it again. When the congratulations started to come in, I was taken aback.

What's been the biggest change, day-to-day, in your routine since becoming a leader at the firm?

Very little. The Boies Schiller way is that firm leadership continue to run their law practices and my experience has been no different. My primary responsibilities are to grow the firm's up-and-coming international arbitration practice group and look after our London office. Whilst the executive committee position requires me to think about the firm's interests as a whole, I've only ever been interested in growing that practice and office in ways that benefit the wider firm.

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

As I was elected through a vote of my partners, it's really not for me to say!

Since joining four years ago, I have made a concerted effort to get to know my partners and learn about their practices across the entire firm network. Within a few weeks of joining, I did a tour of the firm's U.S. East Coast offices to introduce myself and explain how I viewed our London office as a gateway to the rest of the world, not simply an English law capability. Those efforts have paid off, as our London office now works seamlessly with our lawyers in other offices. Being "the Philly guy" in London probably didn't hurt.

In terms of what I would bring to the role, I told my partners I wanted to expand the business and ensure that in doing so, we acted with integrity. Perhaps that appealed to them.

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

At the risk of cliché, I'm always on the go, so technology for me is really simply a means of communication and conveyance. I encourage our international arbitration team to use artificial intelligence tools extensively, but responsibly and transparently. Those same associates are integrally involved in the business development effort and so they utilize technology to learn of gestational disputes and track down client leads. Then I use technology to communicate with and travel to meet those leads.

What advice would you give to someone whose goal is to ascend to firm leadership?

Do it for the right reasons and because you have a genuine affinity for the firm. It's unlikely to lead to any actual increase in prestige or pay and it certainly isn't a gold star that will make up for any childhood inadequacies. Like I tell those on the cusp of partnership—behave like an owner of the business. When you think as an owner, you naturally want to help guide the business's direction.

Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to your leadership role? Please provide name, job title and a brief explanation.

This is the hardest question to answer here. The managing partner of Sullivan and Cromwell's Washington, D.C., office, Robert Craft, was very kind to me when I was a messenger there during my university days, and I always remembered him as an august lawyer, one that I wished to emulate but probably never will.

But my answer is probably Hamish Hume, a member of Boies Schiller's executive committee

and, simply put, a brilliant lawyer. Hamish is a leader by nature, runs a thriving practice, possesses a genius like intellect, is funny and warm and always puts the firm's interests above his own. I hope to make a fraction of the contribution to this firm that he has.

Knowing what you know now, if you had a chance to advise or mentor your younger self (at any stage), what advice would you give to yourself and/or what would you do differently?

To my younger self I'd say: Learn acceptance. Stop fighting. Learn Spanish. Carbohydrates, including in liquid form, are not your friend. It's okay that people get mad at you, you don't have to change their minds (see above "learn acceptance"). Don't be afraid to pick up the guitar, you're not as bad at it as you thought.

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

I say this with no glee, but I think it will evolve into a far smaller industry. There will be a lot fewer lawyers. Where I grew up, that was the punchline to a good lawyer joke—"a good start". But I think artificial intelligence is creating a huge barrier to entry. We will need fewer junior associates and the room for error will be microscopic in nature. I don't think someone like me—who came from a working class background, who didn't attend the best schools or start at the best firm—will be a partner in a preeminent law firm in 20 years' time.

What is the one behavior or trait that you have seen derail more leaders' careers?

Many come to mind, but in the words of the seminal hip hop group Gangstarr—"the money though—it's got people acting funny yo." Some law firms will recruit laterals, pay them oodles of money and all of the sudden they're different people. Ambitionless, fixated on the material trappings of the gig and unrooted from the things that made them an industry leader in the first place. We only got to where we are because teams of associates and administrators ran through walls for us. You owe it to them and the practice of law itself to keep building something. No one really cares about your Ferrari.

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

I have the same goal that I had four years ago—to expand Boies Schiller's international business. We are doing that, and we hope to do a lot more of it.

What career advice do you wish more people would ask you?

I'm not David Brent, I don't wait around for people to come ask me advice. I'm no oracle.

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

My job at the firm is to grow the firm's business. I hope that by the end of my first term on the executive committee, which runs through the end of 2028, I have helped grow the firm's international revenues considerably.

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