



ABOVE THE LAW

An Elite Litigation Boutique Where Associates Gain Early Trial Experience And Learn By Doing

By Staci Zaretsky | November 4, 2024

Holwell Shuster & Goldberg is committed to developing the finest associates by putting complete trust in them at the earliest opportunity, allowing them to grow exponentially as litigators.

When we think of the perks that an elite law firm might offer to its attorneys, our minds often (quickly) wander to the realm of compensation. While big bonuses and even bigger salaries are highly regarded in the legal profession, perhaps it's time to expand our horizons and consider a firm's culture and learning opportunities as major selling points. Your firm may offer extensive benefits of all kinds, but do attorneys feel like they're growing in their trade? Are lawyers at your firm being truly taught to excel in the field?

[Holwell Shuster & Goldberg](#) — the elite boutique founded in 2012 by former Southern District of New York Judge Richard Holwell, along with former White & Case colleagues Mike Shuster, Dan Goldberg, and Dorit Ungar Black — is a destination firm for litigators. More than a decade later, HSG is an award-winning firm, having recently claimed the title of Benchmark Litigation's [New York Law Firm of the Year](#), and boasts nearly 80 lawyers peeled away from Biglaw mainstays. Associates at the firm are also getting paid like their Biglaw brethren. The firm has matched the Cravath salary and bonus scale since 2016, but the compensation isn't the only major draw for talent at the firm. Holwell Shuster focuses on really training its attorneys for a lifetime of success in court, and makes a conscientious effort to make each of them feel empowered through early career experience.

Holwell Shuster & Goldberg is completely committed to developing the finest associates by putting complete trust in them at the earliest opportunity, allowing them to grow exponentially as litigators. We recently had the chance to chat with several associates at the firm, who spoke incredibly highly of the many opportunities that have been afforded to them through the firm's unique training style.

It's often said that the best lawyers learn by doing. How does Holwell Shuster & Goldberg's model embody that sentiment?

[LAUREN COLE](#): I came to HSG because I wanted the opportunity to learn more by doing. I wanted the opportunity to lead my cases and take the lead on important parts of the case, like depositions and motion practice.

Right away, I was put in the position of being a key strategic mind on my cases. I was helping to craft our discovery and deposition strategy. I was learning how to manage a case and plan ahead, not just reacting whenever I was given an assignment.

One of my best experiences came when I was a fourth-year associate. I had been working on a case for the better part of two years and knew the documents and our story inside and out. It was a billion-dollar international arbitration hearing, so there was a lot at stake, but the lead partner on the case gave me my own witness to take at trial and had me prep our key witnesses in the case. That opportunity was indicative of my experience here as a whole. Partners and more senior associates do not keep opportunities at bay for more junior associates. If you show that you are eager for the work and the opportunities, they will come to you.

I have yet to ask for an opportunity that I did not get, whether that be oral arguments, taking depositions or writing dispositive motions. That is part of the reason I have truly enjoyed growing my practice here. HSG is a place where the partnership really invests in the development of its associates early on in their careers.

What makes trial work fun?

[IAN MILLER](#): I had a blast at our trial representing a small supplier against Walmart. I loved that the intense pace meant that I saw the impact of my work immediately, as my research done one night would be immediately tested in my argument in court the next morning. Our lean trial team was a true team effort, and because the partners took everyone's strategic ideas seriously, the whole team was motivated to stay focused on how their individual pieces of the trial fit into the broader strategic vision.

I was really invested in each twist and turn of the trial, and each night during trial I drafted part of an outline of the closing argument and sketched a few potential slides for the closing. Closing arguments landed on a Monday, and we had a furious push over the weekend to get everything ready. Because I had already developed an outline and some slides throughout trial, my work helped shape the final themes and narrative. Watching

the jury's reaction to those ideas during our closing argument and then waiting for their verdict was equal parts exciting and excruciating, but it was all worth it when the foreperson announced a \$101 million verdict for our client.

Trial work isn't the only thing that's fun at Holwell Shuster. Here's the firm's London Luxury trial team viewing the total solar eclipse between closing arguments in the case. Miller is the associate taking the selfie shot here, along with the rest of the trial team. In the front row (from left to right) are Brendon DeMay, HSG partner; Karen Sebaski, HSG counsel; and Priyanka Timblo, HSG partner. In the back row (from left to right) are Scott Richardson, Arkansas counsel; Christine Sun, former HSG paralegal; Ben Allen, former HSG associate; Mike Pusterla, FTI trial graphics; and Gordon Lewis, London Luxury.

How has the firm's early trial exposure for associates impacted your career development?

BRIAN GOLDMAN: HSG's early trial exposure has positively impacted my career development in innumerable ways. The key adjective in that question is "early," because when you get stand-up trial experience towards the start of your career, the next time you do it — and then the third and fourth time you do it — you can start to hone your style, all while still being an associate, which is really rare these days in high-impact litigation practices. I've experienced this firsthand. When I was a junior associate, I second-chaired a bunch of examinations in a major federal antitrust jury trial. I got to see so many different styles and approaches from all types of good lawyers — both at HSG and from our opposing counsel — and filed that away as sort of live practice tips. And then a few months later, I actually took a witness in an international arbitration seated in Switzerland. I was across from the senior partner on the matter, who worked at a Biglaw firm. I was highly focused on doing the examination technically correctly — getting out all the questions, and hopefully, the answers we needed — and just wanted to avoid any hiccups. Following that, across the years, I had other opportunities, including examining witnesses in a different international arbitration merits hearing, and then in a bankruptcy trial in federal court in Houston. In all these instances, you're continually honing your style, finding the pitch that is comfortable for you, and also just becoming more confident. Things slow down a bit. And so, by the time I examined witnesses in a jury trial in Seattle federal court a few months ago, I remember one of the witnesses who I was examining asked me if I was his first — and I very proudly said "nope!" As you go on, you're still focusing on getting down to brass tacks and making sure the examination is technically sound, but the experience that you have is a reed you can lean on and learn from, and lets you look beyond the outline and adjust based on what the witness is saying, how the jury or judge is reacting, why you're drawing an objection from opposing counsel, and that type of thing. And building that confidence and familiarity while you're an associate is invaluable.



What does it feel like to work at a firm where you're entrusted with a substantial role in a high-stakes litigation matter so early in your career?

CHARLOTTE BAIGENT: It's both motivating and humbling. I am so grateful to work with incredibly talented lawyers I admire, who are also kind, supportive, and encouraging mentors and colleagues. Working at a firm where I've been entrusted with significant responsibilities in high-stakes litigation early on has pushed me to become a better lawyer as quickly as I can — to learn to trust my instincts, to lead, to really understand my clients, and to make strategic decisions with the full life of the case in mind. Since joining HSG, I have had opportunities to take and defend many depositions, examine expert witnesses at trial, argue evidentiary issues at trial, draft trial and appellate briefs, and help manage complex, high-stakes litigation. At each of those moments in my career, I had mentors and colleagues who invested a great deal of their time to help me develop my skills and reach the next stage in my career development.

Congratulations to Holwell Shuster & Goldberg for its willingness to put its attorneys' trial experience and career development first, above all else. With a firm culture like this, it makes it a lot easier for employees to feel truly valued as attorneys.