

THE RECORDER

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OFFICE MANAGING PARTNER OF THE YEAR FINALISTS:

**KAHLIL T. YEARWOOD,
GIBSON, DUNN & CRUTCHER**



Kahlil T. Yearwood of Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher is one of the finalists of The Recorder's Office Managing Partner of the Year award. Read a Q&A with him, below.

How would you describe your approach to leadership?

The Gibson Dunn way, as exemplified by our leader Barbara Becker, is to hire great people and then support them in being their best selves. For me, that means not assuming success is one size fits all. It means helping people figure out what success looks like for them—and then removing obstacles so they can get there.

Part of that is supporting all of our colleagues in bringing their whole selves to work every day, and embracing and celebrating our diversity and differences. That's part of why I gave up a traditional office when we moved to One Embarcadero Center. When you sit in the open

alongside everyone else, you hear things sooner, you connect people faster, and you signal that no one is above the team. I also believe in leading by example: I maintain a demanding, full-time national practice because the person asking others to go above and beyond should be willing to do the same.

What are your biggest successes in this role?

Three things stand out. First, growth—we went from roughly 90 lawyers to over 140 and promoted a record seven new partners in 2025. A big part of that has been our recruiting intensity at Berkeley and Stanford, where I'm on campus multiple times a semester showing law students what Gibson Dunn is all about.

Second, reimagining our space at One Embarcadero Center. Giving the best views to all

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of our people instead of corner offices, building a Flexible Work Space model, creating open-plan areas where partners sit with associates—these weren't aesthetic choices, they were cultural statements. The fact that lawyers consistently choose the open floor plan over a "prime" corner office tells me the statement landed.

Third, the people. Being named Gibson Dunn's Mentor of the Year in 2025 was an honor, but what I'm proudest of is watching someone like Prerna Soni—whom I've mentored throughout her career here—make partner and step into firm-wide leadership as co-chair of the Associates Committee. That's the scoreboard I care about.

What issues do you think office managing partners will have to focus on in the next year?

The triple impact of AI. This is not one issue—it's three converging at once. First, office managing partners need to ensure their lawyers are at the cutting edge of using AI tools to deliver faster,

better and more efficient work. The firms that figure this out will have an enormous competitive advantage; the ones that don't will lose their best people and their best clients.

Second—and this is the one I think people underestimate—we need to manage the human side of this transformation. Helping our colleagues navigate change, continue to develop their expertise, and find new ways to drive value for clients even as the tools evolve beneath them.

Third, our clients increasingly need us to advise them on AI-related issues: the development of data centers, privacy and data governance frameworks, and the emerging regulatory landscape around AI itself. The managing partners who thrive will be the ones who hold all three dimensions simultaneously—adopting the technology, supporting their people through change, and advising clients on the legal frontiers AI is creating.