

How I Made Managing Director and Counsel to the CEO: 'I Make Sure That the Teams I Work With Are Relentless in Addressing Our Clients' Needs,' Says Howard Master of Nardello & Co.

"Developing connections with people has been essential to tackling the obstacles I have faced in my career."

By Tasha Norman

Howard Master, 48, Nardello & Co., New York.

Job Title: Managing director and counsel to the CEO at Nardello & Co., a global investigations firm.

Law school & year of graduation: New York University School of Law, 2003.

When did you make GC at your company? I joined Nardello in February of 2022 as managing director and counsel to the CEO, Dan Nardello. In this position, which is different from a regular in-house counsel or general counsel position, I support the firm's white collar defense, civil litigation, anti-corruption and fraud investigation, and monitorship and independent investigation practices, and I advise the firm and its leadership on major strategic initiatives.

Were you GC at another company prior to your current company? Prior to joining Nardello, I held several positions including Deputy Chief of the Criminal Division at the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, Senior Enforcement Counsel to the Attorney General of New York and most recently special counsel to the Suffolk County district attorney.

What was your path to your current role, and when did you decide you wanted this career path? I've always loved investigations. After graduating from Yale and before law school, I worked for several years as a management consultant, because I wanted to help government agencies improve efficiency and better serve the public. That was a great experience, because it involved investigating and trying to understand complex systems and working with a wide range of people on fixing those systems. As a lawyer, I made my way into investigations through my work at the SDNY. When I joined the office, I expressed an interest in and was assigned to work on government corruption cases, which often require intensive investigation to uncover schemes that are sophisticated and involve a lot of concealment. I was fortunate to work with terrific teams to expose a number of significant corruption and fraud schemes over the course of my work at the SDNY, including the biggest-ever fraud against New York City and the corruption scheme involving Sheldon Silver, the former speaker of the New York State Assembly. I started



Howard Master
Courtesy Photo

getting asked to teach new prosecutors about investigations and to work on my offices' most challenging investigations. That's how investigative work became a focus of my career.

If you left private practice, what made you leave the firm to go in-house? I left government to go to Nardello. After serving in the SDNY and in executive roles in state prosecutors' offices, I considered joining a law firm. But I met Dan Nardello and was impressed by the quality of practice he had built and the firm's

reputation for integrity and its position doing the most complex and significant global investigative work. I had good relationships with agents and other specialists (forensic accountants, researchers, digital investigators, data analysts, etc.) as a prosecutor, and the opportunity to continue working with teams with those backgrounds to uncover the truth was appealing. The variety of roles I get to serve in was also appealing. I am leading a number of complex investigations for clients around the world, and as counsel to the CEO I am also helping expand the services we provide into areas such as crypto-tracing and ESG issues. As our CEO Dan Nardello says, “Every day is a ticket to a show,” whether we’re digging for hidden information or out in the field interviewing people to discover information that could affect some of the most complex and interesting matters in the legal field.

What do you do to lead your department effectively? I make sure that the teams I work with are relentless in addressing our clients’ current needs while also anticipating future needs and potential problems. I strive to use my legal experience and the firm’s core legal DNA to understand the bottom-line goals of the matters we are addressing and find the right path to attain those goals while always emphasizing ethics and integrity.

In this time of COVID-19, has being remote helped you to be more integrated and visible in the company? Collaboration is essential to all that we do. We are a global firm with offices in London, Hong Kong, Tokyo and Dubai as well as New York and Washington, D.C., and we’re opening in Los Angeles and likely

elsewhere in the near future. And our clients operate in countries all over the world. Connectivity is essential, so while I’m often not in the office and I certainly utilize virtual meetings, I’m not remote. I travel to meet with colleagues and clients. I was recently in London.

What would you want from the law firms you work with? We interact with many law firms on a daily basis. They bring us in to help with all sorts of matters—criminal investigations and prosecutions, litigation, internal investigations, transactional due diligence. We uncover the facts that help them win cases, close deals and solve problems. The relationship works best when we have a full understanding of the issues our clients are trying to address and what theories or facts they are trying to develop to address those issues. The more information we are provided about the assignment, the more new information we can unearth to address the challenges attorneys and their clients are facing.

What obstacles have you faced and overcome in your career? I’ve faced a number of challenges over the course of my career trying to uncover schemes that people have tried really hard to keep hidden. This often requires understanding really complex systems to determine what went wrong and why. When I was a federal prosecutor working on the Sheldon Silver case, for example, I had to understand how the New York state legislative funding process was supposed to work in order to understand how Silver had manipulated it for his own benefit. To do that you need to get people who actually have inside knowledge to speak to you. You often



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don’t know what source will provide the most important information. So it’s important to always do your homework before approaching any potential source of information, listen actively and carefully to them, and treat everybody with respect. Developing connections with people has been essential to tackling the obstacles I have faced in my career.

What’s the best advice you received, and what advice would you give to a lawyer who wants to go in-house? A good piece of advice I received early in my career was to be unafraid to pursue what interests and excites you the most, wherever that takes you, because that’s what is going to make you happy and effective. As for advice to lawyers considering investigation firms, they really are a great option for lawyers who enjoy utilizing a variety of skill sets and the thrill of discovering new information. It’s an exciting place to be and a valuable service for clients often facing their most-consequential challenges.

Knowing what you know now, what would you tell yourself as a younger lawyer (first-year lawyer)? Don’t get overwhelmed by the complexity of a challenge, regardless of how daunting it might seem. With time, persistence, some creativity and a good team, you can figure out pretty much anything.