

## Rising Star: Mayer Brown's Adam Wolk

Law360, New York (July 16, 2017, 3:02 PM EDT) - Mayer Brown LLP's Adam Wolk has become one of the leading lawyers in finance and has helped companies like restaurant giant Yum Brands Inc. and private equity firm The Jordan Co. secure the financing they need to get their businesses moving forward, earning him a spot as one of five banking law practitioners under 40 honored by Law360 as Rising Stars.

### **WHAT DROVE HIM TO TRANSACTIONAL LAW:**

Wolk said that he has always had an interest in finance, dating back to his days as an undergrad at the University of Vermont and his time working at investment bank Bear Stearns. Once in law school, Wolk turned his attention to transactional work, because it had a different feel than preparing for court battles.

"I feel like transactional law is pretty cooperative and collaborative, in that there's usually no dispute. The two sides are working together to come to a deal. Things can get testy during negotiations for sure, but generally everyone's interests are aligned in trying to get the deal done. I like that collaborative approach, where, in a lot of ways, you feel like you're working with the counsel for the other side."

### **HOW HIS EARLY EXPERIENCES SHAPED HIS CAREER:**

Wolk joined Mayer Brown after finishing law school in 2007, less than a year before the global financial crisis hit. That calamity has shaped both the way that banks and borrowers approach negotiations and how he approached his career.

"Very early in my career I got to see what happens in a downside scenario: the contingency that lawyers are here to protect against," Wolk said. "It was really interesting to have that

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**STAR**



**Adam Wolk**  
**Mayer Brown**

**Age:** 37

**Home base:** New York

**Position:** Partner

**Law school:** University of Virginia School of Law

**First job after law school:** Associate at Mayer Brown LLP

background early in my career. Going forward, I had a good understanding of the types of things lenders are protecting against in their documents."

**THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGE IN HIS CAREER:**

Wolk was one of the lead attorneys helping restaurant giant Yum! Brands engage in a major restructuring. Wolk's portion of the deal was a \$3.5 billion senior secured credit facility that closed in June 2016.

"Yum had always been an investment grade company, but upon spinning off their China business and incurring additional debt, they are now classified as 'leveraged,' Wolk said. "Investment grade companies tend to have, if they have loans, very loose loan documents. So the company had to get comfortable with more robust loan documents that have tighter loan covenants. A lot of that process was negotiation, and a lot of that process was working with the company to make sure they understood the scope of the new documents and make sure that they had the flexibility under these documents that they needed and wanted."

"With Yum, they're really smart people and they really know their business needs," Wolk said. "And when a company is really for the first time learning to live with a set of covenants that they haven't had to before, it's just more interesting. I wouldn't say it's more difficult, but it's more interesting."

**HIS ADVICE TO YOUNG LAWYERS:**

Wolk played a big role in completing complex deals when he was associate and was more or less taking the lead on several deals prior to being named partner in January 2016. He said the best advice he can give to first-year associates is to look for ways to get involved.

"Our work is complicated," Wolk said. "Our documents are complicated, so you shouldn't expect that you'll understand it on day one. A lot of tasks that first years are given are not as substantive as they would like. The advice I always give is, even if you're not asked to turn the major deal documents, take a look at them. Take a look at what's being negotiated, listen on calls and try to learn by osmosis."

"To the extent you can, as early as you can in your career, try to get opportunities to draft documents and negotiate them. The earlier that you get substantive experience and can make yourself a substantive expert, the better that is for your career. But you also have to be patient and not expect to learn everything in the first six months."

*--As told to Evan Weinberger*

*Law360's Rising Stars are attorneys under 40 whose legal accomplishments belie their age. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2017 Rising Stars winners after reviewing more than 1,200 submissions. This interview has been edited and condensed.*