

They've Got Next: **The 40 Under 40**40  
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# Jin-Kyu Baek of Cravath, Swaine & Moore

Lisa Helem, Executive Editor | MP McQueen, Editor | August 12, 2025

## Please describe two of your most substantial, recent wins in practice.

It is always an honor and privilege to have the opportunity to support clients on their most significant transactions, especially in the context of a long-standing relationship. Our great familiarity with a client enables us to be the best advisers we can be and achieve an amazing level of partnership.

As an example, I have represented Johnson & Johnson in a number of transactions dating back to when I was an associate and most recently advised on its acquisition of Intra-Cellular Therapies, the largest health care transaction so far this year and one of J&J's largest acquisitions in recent years.

I also represented Aon in its \$13 billion acquisition of NFP, a leading middle-market property and casualty broker. This transaction involved a complicated collar structure to help ensure an optimal allocation of transaction consideration between cash and Aon stock and the process of negotiating and finalizing the structure was both challenging and ultimately satisfying. The transaction was announced at the tail-end of my first year as a partner and was a great capstone to the year.

## What is the most important lesson you learned as a first-year attorney and how does it inform your practice today?

One of the most important lessons I learned as a first-year associate was the importance of being available. The nature of our work means that our clients often find themselves in urgent situations and early on I realized that responsiveness—even a simple email acknowledging the issue—can make a big difference in helping clients feel supported and confident.

Being a trusted adviser means that you have to put yourself in your client's shoes, and the more touchpoints you have with the client, the better you are able to learn directly from the issues that clients are facing. This mentality also helps foster a sense of ownership over matters and client relationships and can create valuable learning opportunities for junior associates.

It also has a positive reinforcement effect as you can establish yourself as someone who can be relied on and be present, which can lead to more opportunities for growth. Mentoring is a two-way street—there are people who are eager to invest in you and help you succeed, but you need to make sure you are in a position to take those opportunities when they arise.

## How do you define success in your practice?

I view the M&A practice as a team sport. Success as a team means that we achieve a successful outcome for our client, but also for each member of the team to have contributed meaningfully to that outcome and grown from it. While the former is obviously critical to what we do and the bedrock of our



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practice, at Cravath there is also a tremendous focus on making sure we are developing the next generation, with the shared understanding that this is critical for the firm's ability to continue to deliver for our clients the level of excellence that is expected of us.

It also underscores that lawyering happens at all levels—from advising in the boardroom and negotiating against a counterparty to more routine matters like supporting a client with ancillary documents or diligence requests. I think what's most rewarding is if our client feels like they have been fully supported across all areas of a transaction, and each member of our team feels like they've aced their respective areas of the deal and are ready to shoulder more responsibility in the next one.

### **What are you most proud of as a lawyer?**

I am most proud of the opportunities that I've had over the years to work with Cravath's long-term clients and the role that I've played in sustaining and developing these relationships.

Cravath has decades-long histories with many of our clients, and they come to us with their most critical and complex legal matters. Having the opportunity to work on these matters is humbling, and that feeling is even more pronounced when you think about the fact that you're following a long line of partners that you look up to and admire who are entrusting you to be the next steward of these important relationships.

It really makes you feel like you're part of something that's bigger than yourself and makes it all the more rewarding when we are collectively able to demonstrate to our clients across numerous transactions the level of quality and dedication that we're able to consistently deliver as a firm and meet the very high bar that is expected of us. This also provides an added source of motivation with new clients, with which I'm always thinking about building an enduring relationship that will go beyond just my practice, and I'm privileged to work at an institution that can provide excellence across the most critical areas of need for our clients.

### **Who is your greatest mentor in the law and what have they taught you?**

I've had the privilege of working with my M&A partner Bob Townsend as an associate and the junior partner on many of his deals. Through this experience I've learned a great deal about technical expertise, creative lawyering, client service and pragmatic business judgment. Moreover, Bob has done so much to help develop the future talent of Cravath's M&A platform.

When I was an associate, he made sure that I was always learning and being challenged and growing as a lawyer, all while fostering collaboration, which is a fundamental tenet of Cravath's culture. I take especial pride in my responsibility as a partner to do my part in shaping our elite M&A practice by developing associates and encouraging them to put their hands up for opportunities, just the way Bob has done for me.

### **Tell us your two favorite songs on your summer music playlist.**

"Yellow Submarine" by The Beatles and "Barbara Ann" by The Beach Boys. I've been trying to get my son to listen to the same bands that I'm into, and so far, these songs have been the most (and really the only) success I've had.