

Thompson Coburn partner: from diplomat to M&A lawyer

By Noemi Distefano January 27 2026



From term sheets to closings, M&A partner Aaron DeLong discusses the challenges and craft of dealmaking

Aaron DeLong joined [Thompson Coburn](#) as an M&A partner in October 2025 from New Orleans-headquartered firm Lugenbuhl, Wheaton, Peck, Rankin & Hubbard, where he was a shareholder and member of the commercial and transactional group.

Before entering private practice, DeLong was a US foreign service officer, negotiating investments and policy initiatives across the Middle East. His work at Thompson Coburn focuses on cross-border transactions, project finance, and guiding boards through complex strategic deals.

In this Q&A with IFLR, DeLong discusses his career, day-to-day work, and the skills required to succeed in transactional law.

Someone asks you at a party what you do for a living. What do you say?

I'm an M&A lawyer. I help companies buy, sell, finance, and reorganise businesses, mostly in capital-intensive sectors like agribusiness, energy, maritime, and infrastructure. A lot of my job is helping clients think through what they want to do, whether it makes sense, and then how to get it done.

Talk us through a typical working day.

Today started with a call from a client who needed me in Houston, so I got on a plane and spent the day at their offices working through issues in real time. Other days are a mix of calls, drafting, and staying closely connected with current and prospective clients. As a newer addition at my firm, I'm also focused on continuing to learn more about my colleagues and how we can collaborate.

What are you working on at the moment?

Right now, I'm working on a potential joint venture transaction, along with a few active energy asset acquisitions. I'm also guiding a middle-market services company through a separation between its two largest equity holders. It's a good example of the range of issues that can come across my desk in a single week.

What is the most exciting aspect of your role, and what is the most stressful?

The most exciting part of the job is working closely with clients to understand their goals, develop a game plan, and execute a transaction from term sheet to closing. Seeing a complex transaction get signed, funded, and implemented is deeply satisfying.

The most stressful moments come when issues surface late in the process, and timelines compress, leaving little room for adjustments.

Tell us the key characteristics that make a successful transactional lawyer.

Communication is critical. Clients need to know they can reach you and that you'll give them straightforward answers when decisions need to be made. Sound judgment, reliability under tight timelines, and taking the time to understand how a client's business really operates are what ultimately make a transactional lawyer effective.

What is the most common misconception about being a transactional lawyer?

Many people assume transactional law is mostly about drafting documents. In reality, the documents reflect the work rather than define it.

The real value comes from structuring deals, allocating risk, negotiating terms, and helping clients make sound decisions under pressure.

What or who inspires you?

I'm inspired by clients who are building and growing real businesses, often in ways that affect how people live and work every day. I've also been shaped by mentors who showed that you can be technically strong while remaining calm, decent, and practical.

If you weren't a transactional lawyer, what would you be doing?

I would probably be a farmer. There's something deeply compelling about work where the results are tangible and directly tied to steady effort, patience and care.

Any advice you would give your younger self?

Look for mentors wherever you go, and invest in relationships with friends, colleagues, and clients. Over time, those relationships matter as much as technical skill. And, when it comes to major decisions, trust your instincts.