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STARTING FROM SCRATCH

TEN LAWYERS WHO BUILT PRACTICE SPECIALTIES OUT OF WHOLE CLOTH.

It's a good thing to rise to the top of one's practice specialty—
but creating your practice specialty is even better.



PORTRAIT ILLUSTRATION BY IAN LANGEHOUGH

"PRACTICING LAW doesn't need to be like being in a secret society," says Latham & Watkins corporate partner Kirk Davenport, who has long made it his professional mission to swap opaque jargon for plain English in legal documents. Early in his career, he says, "I remember thinking that it would be much easier to find my way through this maze if anyone of the many people who had been through this before had left some bread crumbs." A decade ago, under the direction of the Securities and Exchange Commission, Davenport spearheaded Latham's development of a plain-English notes section for high-yield bond offerings. Today, the notes section in virtually all high-yield bond transactions is patterned on the Latham template, regardless of whether the firm is involved. Indeed, for a time after the form's introduction, the SEC would tell firms, in comments on bond offerings, to "please conform your description of notes to the Latham & Watkins standard form."