



How Aon's Operations Team Elevated Their Legal Department

Law Department Management



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A seat at the table

When Peter Lieb looked around the room during an education event with his fellow GCs, he wasn't surprised to see that most were sitting alongside their heads of ops. The group had come together to share best practices and learn from each other how to do more with even less. "Ops" is a current industry buzzword, and more and more legal departments are embracing the benefits of a legal department operations leader (although their skill sets and initiatives vary as widely as the organizations themselves).

But as Lieb, EVP and CLO, Aon Global Law, listened to the conversations at the table, what did surprise him was the direct correlation between the quality of the working relationship of each chief legal executive and head of legal operations and their measures of success.

"The heads of operations were clearly close partners with the chief legal officers and other department leaders," Lieb says. "The best COOs seemed to grasp all needs of a law department, including finance, human resources, and technology. They introduced strategic initiatives, drove change, and helped make the law department more valuable to the entire company."

Lieb knew that his next head of legal operations would have a greatly expanded role among the senior leadership of Aon's global legal department.

A favor for a friend

Audrey Rubin, VP and COO, Aon Global Law, originally agreed to meet with Lieb as a favor for a friend, an executive recruiter and mutual acquaintance approached by Lieb. An established industry consultant to law firms and in-house legal departments, Rubin is also the former head of operations at multiple law firms and the corporate general counsel of two global organizations. Over the course of her career, she has streamlined her clients' budgets, improved hiring processes, implemented successful alternative fee arrangements, revamped executive compensation programs, and championed diversity initiatives that have proven to boost bottom lines and enhance talent performance. She's created collaborative relationships between legal and finance, IT, human resources, compliance, marketing, and professional development — with each promoting the value of the legal department throughout her clients' organizations.

When you can pick and choose clients eager to embrace innovation and adopt better processes (two characteristics not traditionally found within the legal profession), why join a global risk management, HR consulting, and reinsurance company with 50,000 employees in 120 countries around the world — not to mention more than 400 in-house lawyers and professionals?

"Everything that Peter and his team wanted to achieve resonated within me," Rubin says of the ever-expanding role she has held since 2011. "Every part is stuff that I'm interested in, that I excel in, and where I feel I can bring value. I could have written the job description in my sleep."

As for how Rubin adjusted to the transition from owning her own firm and leading legal departments to reporting to a new CLO? "Peter is smart — he's frank, honest and demonstrates high integrity. And the others on the team were exactly like that," Rubin says of Lieb and her Aon colleagues. "He knew what he wanted, but he didn't know how or have the resources to get there, which meant I could bring value." She continues:

"Peter needs to practice law and advise the company at the highest levels. He should not and

realistically could not spend his time developing budgets, negotiating rates with legal vendors, analyzing strategic changes for the department and most other initiatives that it takes to run a top-notch, well-regarded department.”

It wasn't difficult for Rubin and Lieb to align goals — she officially joined Aon during budget season and it quickly became clear that there was a lot of work to do to control legal spend and increase the predictability of litigation costs.

“When I arrived, we had an entire legal group that operated without a useful budget,” Rubin says. “The department didn't know what it was spending or why. There wasn't meaningful personal accountability by legal department leadership — and there couldn't be because nobody ever sat down to figure out how to build a centralized department budget across all business units with detailed accounting from the bottom up, while also drilling down to understand each cost.”

Visibility and unwavering support

Additionally, Lieb's visible support for Rubin — which was evident from day one — was imperative to her success. “I was viewed as a peer right from the start,” Rubin says, adding that she wouldn't have joined Aon otherwise. She is one of 10 members of the senior leadership team and serves as chief of staff (note: all new hire requests are approved by Rubin). Lieb trusts Rubin to helm strategic operations initiatives, and she meets with her senior leadership counterparts four times a year — across global time zones — to synchronize messaging. To ensure that there is understanding and buy-in throughout the department after the global meeting, they also conduct lengthy follow-up discussions with mid-level colleagues and their cohorts.

With Rubin's guidance, Aon's legal department deployed the Law Department Strategic Improvement Project — a multi-faceted program that earned a 2016 ACC Value Champion Award for Aon. The company's in-house and firm lawyers attended joint LEAN/Six Sigma training to map processes and identify areas of improvement — a particular area of expertise driven by Rubin. The team also partnered with the procurement department to standardize and expand the RFP process and transferred 40 percent of all US legal matters to flat fee arrangements. Contract work remained in-house but moved to India and Poland, reducing costs by 50 percent and turnaround time by 66 percent, and Aon created a global rotation program to further knowledge of the company and boost employee engagement, which has seen a 45 percent increase since Rubin's arrival.

“Peter is extraordinary in his generosity of spirit, and he has the back of this entire senior team,” Rubin says. “We [senior leadership] really operate beautifully together. The key is in assembling a team that is diverse — not only men and women — but diverse in education, background, and style. We're free to talk among ourselves, to challenge each other, and to present new information and ideas.”

The ambitious and innovative curriculum of the award-winning program is also largely attributable to Lieb's trust in Rubin, her legal ops team, and the rest of the legal department leadership.

“Many of Aon's successful initiatives and improvements are a result of Audrey's great collaboration with senior leaders throughout the department and the company,” Lieb says. “She is a respected and trusted colleague.”

To his peers looking to replicate Aon's success within their own organizations, Lieb offers the

following guidance:

“My advice to other GCs who want to get more done and take their department to the next level: find a chief operating officer who understands all aspects of how law departments should run, and who shares and will help execute your vision.”



Peter Lieb is the executive vice president, chief legal officer, and general counsel of Aon. He leads Aon’s global law department and manages legal, regulatory, and government relations matters for Aon and its business units globally.



Audrey H. Rubin is the vice president and chief operating officer of Aon. She is responsible for all financial, technology, personnel, and other business matters of Aon's law department, which has over 250 lawyers worldwide and provides strategic legal counsel to all Aon business lines.

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