



Being a True Partner

Career Development



As one who has lived, studied, and worked in quite a few locales — Montreal, Shanghai, Doha, and my native Paris — I know first-hand how valuable the support of the company’s relocation team can be. As advisors to the business, in-house counsel contribute to, and help enforce, policies established by corporate human resources (HR) and senior leadership on these issues and more. In a connected world where change is the new normal, HR policies and procedures constantly evolve to reflect new legal requirements and workforce best practices. Therefore, it’s imperative that the legal department be a true partner to HR.

In order to be that partner, I recommend brushing up on some essential skills, starting with active listening. Our profession is known for giving advice, but to provide effective counsel, we need to listen more and ask the right questions, while ensuring that the lines of communication are consistently open. This is necessary to clearly understand our internal clients’ objectives, needs, and wants. Naturally, HR’s objectives are wide-ranging — from disaster planning and facilitating employee engagement, to hiring and retaining a top quality workforce. With this in mind, in-house counsel have ample opportunity to put those skills into practice.

While a company’s employees can be one of its greatest assets, when they are not managed effectively, they can become one of its biggest liabilities. Therefore, lawyers often support the HR function by mitigating the risks that come with hiring and firing, and ensuring compliance. We are lawyers, after all. However, if we focus primarily on risks and the “law,” we miss a tremendous opportunity to partner with HR in ways that truly make a difference in the work-life of our colleagues, such as supporting the ability to hire, train, and cultivate a diverse, high-performing, motivated workforce or assuring workforce safety. There’s much we can offer outside of contract reviews and traditional legal advice, and by actively participating in our work communities, we demonstrate value in other areas. Being a good partner to the business involves not only advising on what not to do, but

also furthering the understanding of objectives in order to offer solutions on what to do — and how to do it right. For information and ideas to advance your journey toward becoming a true partner to the HR department, I encourage you to explore the many resources developed by the [Employment & Labor Committee](#).

We spend approximately one-third of our lives at work, which means our coworkers often become more like family. As in-house counsel, we have a unique responsibility to our “work family,” including being aware of the effect that our advice has on their jobs and the office environment. Through communicating and addressing any challenges head on — and being an accessible resource for anyone who has questions or concerns — the legal department, along with HR, can help navigate the company through any potential workplace challenge. And as always, ACC members are here to help.

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