

Chapter Spotlight: ACC Colorado

Interviews and Profiles





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ACC Docket interviews Amy Klempt, corporate attorney, COBank, ACB, and Dennis Kaw, general counsel, Appliance Factory, about their experiences on the ACC Colorado Board of Directors, as well as their involvement in the chapter's recently created mentorship program.

How did you get started with the Colorado Chapter? What do you like most about being in-house counsel?

Klempt: I joined the planning committee for the chapter's new Emerging Leaders Group in 2014. At the time, I had been in-house counsel for less than two years and was looking for ways to become more involved in ACC and the Denver in-house community. The Mentoring Program was one of the first initiatives of the ELG, and helped to form a core group of new-to-in-house lawyers to attend the ELG events. I organized the Mentoring Program in 2014 and in 2015. One of the mentees from 2015, Jessica Borchers, took over in 2016 and continued to build the program.

How did you recognize a need for a mentoring program within your chapter? How did you get it started?

Klempt: The idea originated with our board member, Dennis Kaw, who started the ELG group and was identifying programs and events geared towards new-to-in-house lawyers. Our local bar association had, and continues to have, a successful mentoring program for new lawyers, but it is primarily composed of lawyers in private practice. Dennis recognized a specific need for new in-house lawyers to build connections and have opportunities for career development. Initially, for the first year of the program, we matched new-to-in-house lawyer "mentees" with chief legal officer "mentors." The mentors and mentees were asked to meet at least one time for lunch or coffee during the year and we held a reception for all participants. The response was positive, but few long-term mentoring relationships seemed to develop between the participants. In 2015, for the second year of the program, we completely changed the structure to group mentoring.

Kaw: Having been involved in various traditional mentoring programs, Amy and I recognized that such a program would not work for our ACC members because of the tremendous time commitment involved. Accordingly, we looked for ways to make the mentor-mentee relationship more organic — all while making the time commitment for both sides as minimal as possible. First, we told mentors that their commitment was only to meet the mentee once to determine whether or not to continue the relationship. We then we put the onus on the mentees to cultivate that relationship. This empowered the mentors to determine their commitment, and the mentees to make the relationship work.

In 2015, we recognized we could achieve the same organic relationship building between potential mentors and mentees by having group mentoring sessions at which three to four CLOs discussed professional development topics with a group of 15 to 20 mentees. Amy created the group sessions, and again put the onus on the mentees to find a match and cultivate a mentoring relationship.

What is the process for the program?

Klempt: Three to four mentoring events are held throughout the year in order to build relationships

within the group. At each event, a topic is chosen and three to four CLOs or senior in-house lawyers speak to the group about their personal experiences with the issue. In 2016, we began splitting the group into smaller discussion circles. By doing this, mentees ask more questions and dive deeper into an area of interest with one of the mentors. Mentors speak at a single event and perhaps respond to follow-up requests and questions from mentees on an individual basis thereafter. Alternatively, the mentees are able to meet and ask questions in a comfortable atmosphere.

How do you ensure the program's benefit and legacy after you are no longer on the chapter board?

Klempt: a board member has always overseen The Mentoring Program but a non-member ELG committee member has always managed the program. At the end of the year, the current leader of the program has transitioned management to a past mentee participant.

Do you have any advice for chapters that are interested in starting a mentorship program?

Klempt: The group mentoring structure has been significantly more successful for our chapter than a one-to-one matching of mentors and mentees. I would highly recommend looking into a group or circle mentoring structure. The mentoring program has continued to draw an increased number of new-to-in-house attorneys to ACC Colorado events.

Kaw: Don't market it as a traditional mentoring program.



Staff

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