2021 ACC Top 10 30-Something: Nicole Tupman

Interviews and Profiles

The ACC Top 10 30-Somethings awards recognize in-house counsel between the ages of 30 and 39 for their innovation, global perspectives, proactive practice, advocacy efforts, and pro bono and community service work.

For Nicole Tupman, there is always a way to give back — a value she inherited from her parents. Both of her parents were active in unions and her mother served as a union steward, ingraining in her that

she should always be “advocating for those in need.”

Tupman is the first lawyer and college graduate in her family. Raised in the Minneapolis suburbs, she attended Saint Louis University School of Law on a full-ride scholarship. After law school, Nicole clerked for a federal court and then worked for two large national firms. In 2017, Nicole went in-house with Midco, a telecommunications provider and technology company in the Dakotas, rural Minnesota, western Wisconsin, and the Lawrence area of Kansas.

Nicole led her team through the first Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) auction Midco had ever participated in. The approximately nine-month process required her team to learn the auction rules, investigate areas for business expansion, create financial modeling to drive bidding decisions, and create new processes to comply with the auction’s regulatory rules.

“We bid on areas for FCC funding to build out internet in rural America,” Nicole says, specifically referring to the Connect America Fund (CAF), an FCC sanctioned budget set aside to provide fixed broadband and voice services to rural America. In the end, Nicole and her team earned Midco US$38.9 million to use over 10 years to provide high-speed broadband to rural communities. Nicole continues to advocate for Midco and the needs of rural communities before the FCC, state utilities commissions, and state and federal elected officials.

Nicole also led a team to implement a contract tracking, ticketing, and document retention system at Midco. "The tracking system automatically connects to our finance department, so we can make sure we’re paying things like leases on time,” Nicole says, “we have one secure place to store all of our contracts instead of having them spread out through all of our various systems and departments.” As for contract ticketing, “no longer does everything have to go through email,” Nicole says.

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Nicole’s contract work just begins with the new organization system. As a technology company, Midco purchases a lot of equipment, and Nicole collaborated with the procurement team on a new process: circumvent distribution centers and make purchases directly from foreign and domestic manufacturers, leading to reduced pricing and larger purchase agreements than ever before.

Foreign manufacturer partnerships are not the only international ties for the Midwestern company. Nicole also collaborates with national and international trade associations on radio frequency spectrum rights to serve Midco’s most rural customers and expand Midco’s future product and service opportunities.

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Nicole credits her problem-solving skills and creativity as a lawyer to her years teaching. After undergrad, she served two years as a special education teacher for Teach for America in inner-city St. Louis.

Nicole has always made time to give back through pro bono work, so much that her former firm named her Pro Bono Attorney of the Year. “I really feel compelled from my years with Teach for America to make sure that I am trying my absolute best to make a difference in the community,” she says.

Within the legal community, Nicole chairs the In-House Committee for the South Dakota State Bar, organizing CLEs on in-house counsel topics such as legislative reviews, COVID-19 employment issues, and intellectual property rights. The In-House Committee has grown so much under her leadership that it will become a formal Section of the Bar with bylaws and a governing board.

Within her larger community, Nicole volunteers with EmBe, a local organization advocating for women; Rotary; the United Way; the Midwest chapter of Women In Cable Telecommunications; Junior Achievement; and still serves with Teach for America, now as a donor and recruiter.

Starting this fall, she’ll also serve as an adjunct professor at the local law school, which she refers to as, “just another way to give back.”

Read more about the 2021 Top 30-Somethings

Rachel G. Leman

Communications Contractor

Association of Corporate Counsel

Before joining ACC as a contractor, Rachel worked as a reporter at at the DC-based congressional publication CQ, the local Illinois paper the Rock Island-Moline Dispatch-Argus, and her college paper the Augustana Observer, where she also served as editor over the Opinions section.