2021 ACC Top 10 30-Something: Craig Katerberg

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.

Every Sunday night for the past six years, Craig Katerberg has sent an email to his legal team. The email, simply titled “This Week,” outlines that week’s objectives and provides updates on everything

from regional holidays to upcoming beer brand launches to “shouts of recognition.”

The email originated when Craig was general counsel for Carlton & United Breweries, Australia’s largest beer company, and covered the Australia, India, and Southeast Asia markets where he traveled frequently between those locations. “People didn’t know where I would be, when I would be in the air or on the ground, or in what time zone,” Craig explains. “The email started as a way to say, ‘Hey team, physically, this is where I’ll be.’”

It soon evolved into giving recognition across his regional teams, which were integrating as part of the AB InBev-SABMiller merger that formed the world’s largest beer company. The cross-regional chatter fostered a sense of community among his lawyers; teams that previously had little interaction developed an understanding of different cultures and expectations. Craig’s informal tone (he often includes a random photo or two) helps keep the team aware that holidays, like Vietnam’s sacred Tet Lunar Festival, or events, like a new beer brand being launched, are taking place.

Craig likes to know what motivates people. “Having respect for people and knowing what they want to accomplish” is core to his leadership philosophy, he says. “It allows you to match strategic priorities with personal passions.” When he was general counsel for Anheuser-Busch in the United States, Craig surveyed his team to find pain points, such as an outdated system for storing documents and a marketing team that always seemed to have new members asking the same questions.

He zeroed in on 12 key actions, united under the initiative “Legal Ops 2.0.” Some of the fixes were simple. “One of the first things we got working was the teleprompter,” he recalls, “As soon you can achieve small things, people believe change is possible.” Craig brought a stubborn attitude: “Technology should work. And it should work every time. That’s the expectation.”

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The obsolete document storage system was moved to a state-of-the-art cloud network. A one-pager was developed for the marketing team that addressed 80 percent of the questions they asked.

Knowing that a talented colleague was keen to provide in-house continuing legal education credits, and that he himself needed a crash course on the US beer market after years overseas, Craig and his colleague teamed up to create and build the Legal & Corporate Affairs Academy. The academy became a place where knowledge was shared among the team and talent showcased, he says. Topics are chosen by the legal department and subject-matter experts provide deep dives where questions are encouraged.

Craig’s own talent for organization was on display when he teamed up with the president of the India business to create a country-wide process for securing 130,000 critical business licenses in India,

which has different regulations for both operations and sales in each of its 29 states. As part of the merger, the company inherited SAB-Miller's #2 position in the Indian market. Each business license must be renewed annually in a compliant manner — no shortcuts. "Not only did you have to have a Plan B," he says, "but a Plan C and Plan D" in order to operate across a market with different languages and strong views on alcohol (it is outlawed in several states).

Craig was not only responsible for actions after the merger, but the very merger itself rested with his team securing a crucial signature on the US$100 billion deal. "I got a call from our global GC when I was on a three-day trip through India in the summer," he recalls. "I immediately flew to winter in Sydney, where we spent the next month figuring out the situation."

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The government of Australia was about to dissolve in a matter of days, and the political approvals necessary to move the deal forward had yet to be secured. Craig worked through the steps — first obtaining antitrust approval, and then Foreign Investment Review Board approval — before the deal was signed by the treasurer of the Australian government as the last signature before the government dissolved.

Whether sending a weekly email, updating technology, fostering teamwork, or pushing through multibillion deals, Craig approaches every aspect of his job with the same zeal: "Working hard is a gift that we have each been given. Not everyone has that opportunity."

Read more about the 2021 Top 30-Somethings

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