2022 ACC Top 10 30-Something: Cristal Lambert

Interviews and Profiles

The ACC Top 10 30-Somethings awards recognize in-house counsel between the ages of 30 and 39 for their innovation, approach to challenges, well-rounded perspectives, contributions to the in-house community, and pro bono and volunteer work.

Knowing early on she wanted to be a lawyer and wanted to wed her career with goals to help her community, Cristal Lambert carefully set her trajectory. Now, Cristal works in-house, and among

other things, advocates for the needs of the Hispanic/Latinx community and other underrepresented groups.

“I am a first-generation higher education graduate and have known since high school that I wanted to be a lawyer. I felt that having a law degree would facilitate opportunities to advance the Hispanic/Latinx community and other underrepresented groups.”

Now, corporate counsel of litigation at Bed Bath & Beyond Inc. (BBBY), Cristal has developed a life that merges her goals for the Hispanic/Latinx community within a people-facing industry.

As BBBY’s Hispanic/Latinx Associate Resource Group lead, she launched Hispanic Heritage Month programming and led discussions addressing the professional development of Hispanic/Latinx employees, as well as when to use the terms Latinx, Latino, Latina, and Hispanic. (Cristal prefers using Hispanic and Latinx concurrently, but when clearly referring only to women or men, she uses the appropriate feminine or masculine word, Latina or Latino.)

She has also driven initiatives to advance young lawyers, underprivileged high school students, and diversity in the legal profession. As a chair of the Hispanic Bar Association of New Jersey’s (HBA-NJ) annual Corporate Counsel Conference, she spotlights Hispanic/Latinx speakers on high profile corporate issues, increasing the visibility of Hispanic/Latinx talent, and encouraging their inclusion into the C-suite. While chairing the Hispanic National Bar Association’s (HNBA) Young Lawyers Division, she led professional development and speed networking programming for rising attorneys. During her time vice-chairing the HBA-NJ’s American Dream Pipeline Program, she helped create curriculum and mentorship opportunities to expose first generation college-bound students from underprivileged neighborhoods to the legal profession and the college application process.

Seeing some of the high school students she’s mentored go on to college and law school has been gratifying for Cristal. “My service work is like my second job, but I find the work very rewarding and inspiring,” she says.

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A new project for Cristal is her involvement in the HNBA's Latina Commission’s Latina Leadership Academy program, through which she helps create workshops that provide, among other things, guidance on a “grit and growth mindset,” as coined by the commission. After co-chairing the academy in New Jersey, Cristal is helping launch academies in several other states.

“I like to focus on advancing the careers of young attorneys because I was recently there — and I like to especially focus on supporting Latinas — to use my experience to help them gain empowerment in their own personal trajectories,” she says.

Cristal has been recognized at BBBY for chairing a cross-functional policy committee, introducing policy management software, launching an enterprise-wide policy development and standard policy template, and centralizing policies and their review. During her time as compliance counsel, she simplified and automated the Company’s Foreign Corrupt Practice Act trainings targeted to different audiences.

Cristal also works with design teams to assure that website and retail brick-and-mortar stores

accessibility conforms to the American Disabilities Act. “There are situations in which the guidance is unclear. We would rather be preemptive rather than reactive.”

Would-be in-house lawyers should take business courses or otherwise gain business experience and industry-specific know-how, as possible, says Cristal. “There’s a movement now to make in-house lawyers more holistic. For example, in law-school you can take finance-related courses to learn the relevant aspects of the industry you’re interested in. It makes you a more well-rounded and collaborative business partner.”

Additionally, you need to learn that success at the bottom-line for an in-house lawyer comes when you learn how to navigate risk. “In-house attorneys have to be comfortable with ambiguity — that’s what distinguishes you between being in-house versus a firm.”

As for future goals, Cristal is up-front that she wants to be a GC at a Fortune 500 company. “As I continue to embark on this journey, I want to bring others with me. I want to make the legal community more representative of our population — Hispanic/Latinx — but other underrepresented individuals as well.”

ACC will help, Cristal expects, through her new membership. “There are so many opportunities — a new network, different academies, the annual convention — all focused on corporate counsel. This can be pivotal in my journey to become more well-rounded and to become a GC. It’s just very exciting to tap into a new neighborhood. I really like the community I’ve met so far — they are very welcoming.”

Her job, service work, and two toddlers make for a very full day. “I think about work-life balance every day."

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“I’ve come to learn that, especially with motherhood, it’s really about targeting your priorities, and addressing them to the best of your abilities.”

“There is a saying in Spanish — 'todo a su tiempo' — everything at its time.”

Q&A with Cristal Reyes Lambert

As you mentor other lawyers, what have you been learning that is helping you with your career and/or life in general?

Being intentional and specific with your goals and objectives is so important to achieving them. It has made me more self-aware of what I can say yes (or no to) and makes it easier for me to track my "metrics." In a constantly evolving corporate landscape, I find that having a clear vision of what I want to do establishes a baseline for my career and helps me identify opportunities for growth.

When advising my mentees, especially rising attorneys and recent grads, I like to sit down and have a "big picture" conversation as well as an immediate goals checklist. It's "okay" not to know the area or industry you want to ultimately practice in, but you can be intentional with immediate professional milestones that will help you grow and land into your dream role. Interested in retail law? Set retail law Continuing Legal Education (CLE) attendance as a goal, as well as involvement in retail leaders' associations. Interested in compliance, for example, privacy? Consider obtaining your Certified Information Privacy Professional (CIPP) certification this year. The opportunities are endless!

Who inspires you, and what is it they've said or done that influences you?

Professionally, I am inspired by an amazing network of mentors that I've compiled throughout different seasons in my career, a majority of which I've met through organizations such as the Hispanic Bar Association of New Jersey, Hispanic National Bar Association, and New Jersey State Bar Association. I have been especially motivated lately by the work and drive of several mentors who are achieving professional success — while balancing motherhood — something that isn't quite easily achieved and remains a hot topic for women in our profession. Seeing them meet professional milestones and break glass ceilings while "momming" reaffirms my determination that I can and *will* do the same. I want my daughters to know they can accomplish anything they set their minds to — especially in industries where women and Latinas are still underrepresented.

On a personal note, I am also inspired by my family. I would not be here today if it were not for their selflessness and commitment to my success — which has influenced me to strive for the best so that I can honor their sacrifices and further their legacy.

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Debra Z. Roth, an ACC content contractor, has been a journalist, including freelance, and a communications marketing practitioner. Her news stories, features, and editorials have been published in *The Washington Post*, *Newsday*, magazines, websites, and aired on broadcast. And she has led international marcomm for non- and for-profits, including the YWCA USA, National Association of Secondary School Principals, and the National AIDS Fund (now AIDS United), and worked at PR firms, including the Academy for Educational Development (now fhi 360). Her clients have included the National Legal Aid & Defender Association, US Department of Justice, Georgetown University Hospital, and the Tinner Hill Heritage Foundation.