



**Your Launch Pad: Influence and Visibility: A Playbook for In-house Counsel**

**Career Development**



Banner artwork by Anton Vierietin / *Shutterstock.com*

For many in-house lawyers, the biggest career challenge isn't the complexity of the work. It's that their best work often happens behind the scenes, invisible to the people who decide who gets the next opportunity.

Influence and visibility are not about self-promotion for its own sake. They are about being seen as a trusted advisor whose voice is sought out early on the decisions that matter most. The good news: These are **learnable skills**.

Whether or not you have a formal mentor, you can use your everyday conversations and career decisions as a practical lab to build the kind of influence and visibility that move both your organization and your career forward.

---

## From “red-pen lawyer” to trusted advisor

One mid-level in-house counsel I coached was known as the “red-pen lawyer.” Her contracts were airtight, but the business only brought her in at the eleventh hour — and often with resentment. She was technically excellent, but she was seen as a reviewer, not a partner.

With the support of a senior leader who became an informal mentor, she made three shifts:

- She asked to be included **earlier** in project discussions, explaining that she could help the team move faster if she understood the business goals upfront.

- 
- She started her advice with **business questions** (“What are we solving for?”) rather than jumping straight to legal issues.
  - She framed her guidance as **options with trade-offs**, instead of a single “yes/no” answer.

Within a year, the same colleagues who had avoided her were inviting her to strategy meetings. Her work hadn’t changed as much as her **perceived role** had.

*A useful question for reflection or discussion:*

**Where are you currently being seen as a reviewer, and how could you become more of a partner?**



## **Five practices to grow influence and visibility**

Below are five practices you can use as a simple framework. They align with the five elements I use in my Promotability Index® career self-assessment. If you want a structured way to go deeper, you’re welcome to explore the free assessment as a complimentary tool for your development.

**Clarify your in-house brand.** Your brand is what people say about you when you’re not in the room. As in-house counsel, you want to be known for more than technical accuracy — you want to be known for judgment, practicality, and calm under pressure.

*Reflection prompt:* “If my colleagues described me in three words today, what would they be? What three words would I like them to use in two years?”

---

**Understand the business you serve.** Influence grows when you understand the business model as well as you understand the law. That means knowing your organization's strategy, key metrics, and risk appetite — and tailoring your advice accordingly.

*Reflection prompt:* "What are the top three to five business priorities this year, and how can my legal work directly support them?"

**Show up with executive presence.** Executive presence isn't about being the loudest voice. It's about **clarity, composure, and impact**. In practice, that looks like concise recommendations, a calm demeanor in tense discussions, and no surprises for your stakeholders.

*Reflection prompt:* "How do I come across in high-stakes meetings? What is one specific behavior I could change to increase my impact?"

**Increase strategic visibility.** Visibility comes from being present where consequential decisions are made and where cross-functional work happens. That might mean joining a project team, leading a brief update to senior management, or sharing a practical legal perspective at a business town hall.

*Reflection prompt:* "What is one cross-functional project, committee, or recurring meeting where my participation would add both value and visibility?"

**Invest in everyday influence.** Influence is built long before you need it. Take the time to understand your key internal stakeholders — what success looks like for them, how they are measured, and what keeps them up at night. Regular 1:1s, curiosity, and follow-through go a long way.

*Reflection prompt:* "Which three to five relationships, if strengthened, would make me more effective? What is one concrete step I can take with each person this month?"

---

---

## Visibility through cross-functional work

Another in-house lawyer I worked with volunteered to support a major systems implementation. At first, she was asked simply to “check the contracts.” Instead, she joined working sessions, listened carefully to operational concerns, and translated legal constraints into workable options the team could use.

By the end of the project, she was the person business leaders called when they wanted to launch something new. Her title hadn’t changed yet — but her visibility and influence had. When a promotional opportunity arose the following year, she was an obvious choice.

*Consider for yourself:*

**What’s one visible project or initiative where you could contribute your legal expertise in a more strategic way?**

## Putting it into practice

You don’t need a perfect plan to start. Choose one real situation — a meeting, a decision, or a stakeholder relationship — and apply one of these practices:

- Clarify how you want to show up.
- Prepare one or two business-focused questions.
- Frame your advice as options with trade-offs.
- Follow up afterward to reinforce the relationship.

Influence and visibility aren’t built in a single big moment. They’re built one conversation, one meeting, and one visible contribution at a time. The more intentionally you practice, the faster others will begin to see you — and rely on you — as the trusted advisor you already are.

[Join ACC for more career insights!](#)

---

Disclaimer: The information in any resource in this website should not be construed as legal advice or as a legal opinion on specific facts, and should not be considered representing the views of its authors, its authors' employers, its sponsors, and/or ACC. These resources are not intended as a definitive statement on the subject addressed. Rather, they are intended to serve as a tool providing practical guidance and references for the busy in-house practitioner and other readers.

[Amii Barnard-Bahn](#)



Executive Coach, Strategic Advisor, and Author

Barnard-Bahn Coaching & Consulting

---

Amii Barnard-Bahn, JD, PCC, coaches general counsel, chief legal officers, and senior compliance leaders who are stepping into bigger roles, leading complex change, or reshaping their executive teams. She specializes in CEO and executive transitions, strategic transformation, and executive team dynamics, helping clients accelerate their impact, elevate executive presence, and navigate the politics and pressures of the C-suite.

An attorney and former Fortune 500 Chief Compliance Officer and C-suite executive, Barnard-Bahn is an executive coach and consultant who has worked with Fortune 500 corporate legal executives and their teams at companies such as Adobe, FedEx, AbbVie, and The Gap. Ranked the #1 Global Thought Leader for Careers and in Law by Thinkers360 and a LinkedIn Top Executive Coaching Voice, *Forbes* calls her “one of the top coaches for legal and compliance executives.”

Prior to establishing her coaching consultancy, Barnard-Bahn served as Chief Compliance and Ethics Officer at McKesson US Pharmaceutical, Chief Administrative Officer of the California Dental Association, and Chief Human Resources Officer at River City Bank.

A contributor to *Harvard Business Review*, *ACC Docket*, and *Compliance Week*, Barnard-Bahn guest lectures at UC Berkeley, is a Fellow at the Harvard Institute of Coaching, and is a frequent international speaker and media resource on workplace culture, business ethics, and effective leadership. She earned her JD cum laude at Georgetown, is a member of the California State Bar, and holds a Professional Certified Coach (PCC) certification. She is a member of Marshall Goldsmith's 100 Coaches and the creator of the Promotability Index® career toolkit.

To learn more about Barnard-Bahn's career coaching, check out her [ACC Career Coach profile](#).