



Building Bridges: Moving the Legal Department from Friction to Flow

Law Department Management



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Introduction

In-house legal departments often find themselves caught in a paradox. On one hand, they are indispensable to ensuring compliance, mitigating risk, and safeguarding the organization's reputation. On the other, they are frequently branded with unflattering labels: *"the department of no," "contracting bottlenecks,"* or even *"deal breakers."* These perceptions, while common, are misleading. They do not reflect the true value legal teams bring to the table; rather, they highlight a gap in communication and collaboration. Even more concerning is the recent [2026 State of the Corporate Law Department Report](#) by Thomson Reuters Institute which shares that *while 86 percent of GCs view their departments as significant contributors to organizational objectives, only 17 percent of C-suite executives share this view. Indeed, 42 percent of senior executives believe the legal function adds little or no value to overall company performance.*

I have, through the *Diary of an In-house Counsel* series on LinkedIn, consistently emphasized the importance of reframing the narrative around legal departments. In-house counsels are storytellers, bridge-builders, and strategic partners, but most importantly they are the enablers of growth rather than obstacles when the role is well understood.

A powerful but overlooked tool to achieve this transformation is the **legal roadshow**.

What are legal roadshows?

The Business teams have Investor Roadshows. Investor roadshows are a series of meetings and presentations that involve pitching an IPO or other securities offering to potential [investors](#). In my view, legal roadshows are structured, recurring sessions often held annually or biannually where the legal department engages directly with business stakeholders. These sessions are not mere presentations; they are interactive forums designed to:

- Walk stakeholders through legal processes and explain the “*why*” behind business and legal decisions.
- Provide transparency into workflows, timelines, and compliance requirements.
- Create opportunities for brainstorming, feedback, and alignment on key performance indicators (KPIs) for the legal and commercial teams.
- Build trust by demonstrating that the Legal team is not a barrier but a partner in driving business (*not legal*) success.

As a legal storytelling advocate, Legal Roadshows provide an opportunity for the Legal teams to tell their story, to explain not just what they do, but why they do it, and how it benefits the business. Indeed, storytelling is central to effective lawyering and leveraging this effectively makes for great Legal Roadshows.

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Why Legal Roadshows matter

The value of Legal Roadshows lies in their ability to transform perception. By opening doors of communication, legal teams can shift from being seen as gatekeepers to being recognized as growth partners.

1. Transparency

Transparency demystifies the legal process. When stakeholders understand the rationale behind decisions, they are less likely to view Legal as arbitrary or obstructive.

2. Collaboration

Roadshows create a safe space for collaboration. They invite stakeholders to share pain points, align on KPIs, and co-create solutions. This collaborative approach resonates with my philosophy that in-house counsel must be proactive partners, not reactive enforcers. In my experience, I have seen vendors and external partners gain better clarity

from these roadshows when engaged by the Legal Department on why certain contracting decisions were taken. An added understanding of the company's contracting/ partnership processes.

3. Synergy

The ultimate goal is synergy. A shared vision where Legal and Business teams work hand-in-hand. Legal Roadshows help dismantle silos, ensuring that legal considerations are integrated into business strategy rather than treated as afterthoughts.

Benefits of Legal Roadshows

The benefits of Legal Roadshows extend beyond perception; they deliver tangible improvements to organizational performance.

- **Fresh perspectives**

Legal Roadshows invite feedback from colleagues across departments. This feedback often uncovers blind spots and sparks innovative ideas for refining legal processes. In my experience, business feedback led to a process-improvement in partner negotiations which led to enhanced contracting turnaround for the organization.

- **Efficiency**

When stakeholders understand workflows, contracting and deal cycles move faster as stakeholders understand the “why” behind every no.

ACC's "[Value Champions](#)" program has repeatedly highlighted efficiency gains achieved through collaborative legal initiatives.

- **Trust**

Trust is the cornerstone of effective partnerships. Roadshows build trust by demonstrating that the Legal team is invested in the success of the business, not just in risk avoidance.



Experience and impact

Organizations that have embraced roadshows report significant improvements in stakeholder satisfaction and deal cycle efficiency. In my *Diary of an In-house Counsel* writings, I often highlight how small shifts in communication can yield outsized results. For example, a simple walkthrough of contract approval timelines can transform frustration into understanding.

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When Legal teams proactively engage with business units, they are rebranded from “deal blockers” to “deal enablers.” The impact is not just cultural — it is measurable in terms of reduced friction, faster deal closures, and stronger compliance outcomes.

The takeaway

The most powerful takeaway from the roadshows is the reframing of Legal’s identity/perception within the organization. Instead of being the *department of no*, Legal becomes **the department of know**. This shift encapsulates the essence of roadshows: *they are not about saying “yes” to everything, but about empowering the business with clarity, confidence, and compliance*.

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Practical steps to implement Legal Roadshows

For Legal teams considering Legal Roadshows, here are practical steps to ensure success:

1. Define objectives

Clarify what you want to achieve — whether it’s improving contract turnaround times, having stakeholders understand your IP process, building trust, or aligning on SLAs or KPIs.

2. **Engage stakeholders early**

Involve business leaders in shaping the agenda. This ensures relevance and buy-in.

3. **Use visuals and storytelling**

Storytelling is key. Use visuals to make abstract concepts tangible.

4. **Create feedback loops**

Roadshows should not be one-way presentations. Build mechanisms for collecting and acting on feedback. Have deliverables that you can report back to your stakeholders on.

5. **Measure impact**

Track metrics such as stakeholder satisfaction, contract cycle times, and deal success rates to demonstrate the value of roadshows.

Conclusion

Legal Roadshows are more than events; they are a business intervention. They challenge outdated perceptions, foster collaboration, and position the Legal Department as a strategic partner. By embracing transparency, collaboration, and synergy, Legal teams can transform their role from gatekeepers to growth enablers.

The message is simple: **Legal roadshows turn the department of no into the department of know. The Legal team of the future must build bridges and not barriers.**

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Theresa Chikwendu is a distinguished and award-winning legal professional whose career is marked by a proven ability to navigate complex corporate transactions and drive strategic legal initiatives within one of Africa's largest and most influential organizations.

As Principal Consultant, Legal & M&A at MTN Group (**JSE: MTN**), my role involves providing critical legal oversight for M&A, and business development initiatives, ensuring robust legal frameworks that align with MTN's strategic objectives and international best practices. She was previously the former Senior Manager and Head of Department, Corporate Transactions at MTN Nigeria Communications Plc (**NGX: MTN**), where she helped the company structure and negotiate its most complex commercial transactions ranging from financing, mergers & acquisitions, and project finance transactions. She [provided strategic leadership to the business on legal and business issues ranging from corporate transactions, general commercial transactions, stakeholder management, project management, and related matters.](#)

She holds an LL.M Degree from Harvard Law School, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA. Theresa's hobbies include reading, travelling, and she is a big advocate of mentorship. She runs a weekly LinkedIn column known as "***Diary of an Inhouse Legal Counsel***" where she is building a global community for in-house lawyers focused on becoming better strategic business advisors. She also has a collaboration with the African Corporate & Government Counsel Forum on a column titled – ***Legal Insights with Theresa Chikwendu, A monthly Digest for In-House Counsel.***

She is the visionary and convener of the ***#YoungerMe Nuggets Series***, an initiative committed to empowering the next generation of young legal professionals and law students from underrepresented schools/backgrounds with the tools they need for career success globally. She served on the 2023 Annual Meeting Advisory Board of the Association of Corporate Counsel. She is also on the leadership of the International Legal Affairs, and Small Law Department Networks of the Association of Corporate Counsel.

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