



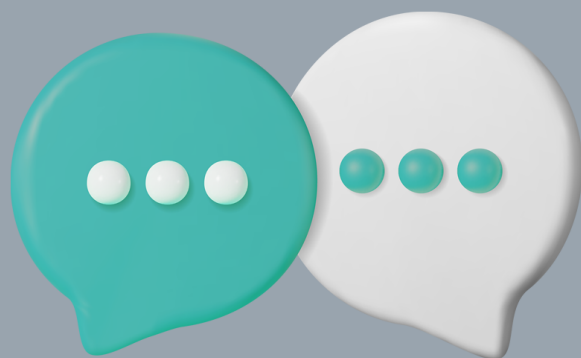
Crisis-tested Lessons: ACC InConversation with Aaron Renenger of World Central Kitchen

Career Development

Community

Interviews and Profiles

Law Department Management



Banner artwork by aslysun / *Shutterstock.com*



Aaron Renenger

Global General Counsel and Chief of Strategic Relations

World Central Kitchen

When disaster strikes, World Central Kitchen (WCK) moves fast.

The global nonprofit has built its reputation on showing up quickly to deliver meals to communities affected by natural disasters and humanitarian emergencies.

But behind its mission to feed people in crisis is a legal operation that must navigate complex risks.

In [a recent ACC InConversation](#), Aaron Renenger, WCK's Chief of Strategic Relations & General Counsel, discussed what it takes to support the organization's humanitarian work.

For in-house counsel, Renenger's experience offers several valuable lessons about managing crisis and staying mission focused.

[Register now to view the conversation on demand!](#)

Managing risk during crisis

The scope of WCK's work is staggering.

The organization has responded to crises in places such as Gaza, Ukraine, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

One of the most complex challenges it faces is balancing speed with risk.

Its teams don't wait for perfect conditions. They pre-position when danger is foreseeable, quickly deploy when emergencies unfold, and work with local communities to deliver meals.

WCK tries to move with its "eyes wide open," identifying risks and reducing them to a level it can responsibly accept, Renenger said.

Decisions are made based on the "best information available," he said.

Sometimes that means going forward despite some uncertainty. Other times it means pausing because there are "blind spots we just can't get comfortable around."

In conflict areas, those decisions can be especially difficult.

Renenger described situations involving using armored vehicles in Ukraine, missile strikes near meal deliveries, and sudden changes that force immediate reassessment.

"Our war stories are, sometimes, actual war stories," he said.

When an organization inevitably faces challenges make sure you consider whether your staff have the right information, tools, and safeguards to make informed choices about risks.

In crisis, legal teams can easily become consumed by what might go wrong.

The lesson for in-house lawyers is not to completely avoid risk, but to evaluate risk in context.

Your organization may not be responding to a humanitarian crisis, but you may be asked to provide guidance when the facts are incomplete and decisions cannot wait.

In-house counsel should ask: What is the business or organizational objective? What risks truly threaten that objective? What risks can be mitigated? What risks must be accepted if the organization is to act?

Staying focused on the mission

Renenger also discussed how his organization remains focused on its mission.

WCK provides meals that are not only nourishing, but culturally familiar. The local approach is central to organization's philosophy.

"When we think of food, it's not just nutrition," Renenger said. "It's hope, it's a reminder of home, it's community, [and] people coming together."

The organization buys from local farmers and hires locally whenever possible.

World Central Kitchen see this approach as critical to helping communities obtain long-term economic independence.

The key lesson for your organization is to remain focused on your company's central mission.

Will an action help the organization feed people? "If the answer to that question is no, then we're not going to do it," Renenger said.

Building strong relationships

By necessity World Central Kitchen operates in politically sensitive environments while trying to remain firmly neutral.

Renenger noted that the organization is often asked to weigh in on political issues, and always politely declines.

Despite its neutrality, the organization is still able to build relationships with governments, local officials, NGOs, and community leaders.

Those relationships can make the difference in getting meals to people quickly.

"Sometimes it is just being mindful that we get a lot further by having respectful, closed-door conversation, instead of trying to mediate or litigate something in the court of public opinion," he

said.

At its core, Renenger's message is about mission-driven legal leadership.

In a world of constant disruption, helping your organization stay focused on the issues that matter most is critical.

Effective in-house counsel don't simply identify obstacles. They help their organizations move quickly, responsibly, and in alignment with their mission.

[Join ACC for more expert 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.

[Association of Corporate Counsel](#)



Staff

ACC