



Tips & Insights: The “King” of Law Department Management

Interviews and Profiles

Law Department Management



“Celebrity” sightings at the ACC 2017 Annual Meeting. // [@seyfarthshawLLP](#)

Did you know Elvis was on tour last fall? It’s true — there are photos to prove it. Right before ACC’s Annual Meeting, he visited Knoxville, San Francisco, Boston’s Fenway Park, Chicago’s Wrigley Field, Seaworld in Southern California, and a smaller, intimate engagement at the Fox Theater in

Atlanta. It wasn't the real Elvis of course; only a cardboard cutout that eventually made its way to the Annual Meeting in Washington, DC.



The publicity stunt was the brainchild of another Tennessean — Stephen Roth, the chair of the ACC Law Department Management (LDM) Committee and vice president and general counsel of Knoxville-based JTV, an electronic jewelry retailer. He invited annual meeting attendees to stop by the LDM Committee business meeting and take a selfie with “the King.” The LinkedIn posts about Elvis’ LDM Tour were viewed over 5,000 times and attendance at the LDM business meeting boomed.

It's part of the committee's larger strategy to draw attention to its ever-important mission and showcases its focus of combining timely, useful content with a healthy dose of fun. Roth worked closely with immediate Past-Chair Matt Nolan to craft a social media strategy that could drive membership growth. With other committee leaders, before the annual meeting, they developed a detailed plan that included establishing a new position: social media chair.

Part of that plan was to create a [YouTube channel](#) for the committee called “In the Lead,” which launched in January. The first videos were created at the Annual Meeting in October.

The videos were the creation of tech-savvy firm sponsor Seyfarth Shaw. The committee set up tripods at the business meeting so that members could attach their camera phones and record content. Props were provided, and each table created its own short film on the spot. Seyfarth created a compendium video featuring 80s era video game music interspersed with interviews. Members talk about how they will “level up” in their legal departments in the next year. “This year, I am going to analyze all the data we have and figure out how we can do a better job on our contracts,” says one interviewee, laughing as he shakes a plastic “floppy” disk.

The committee, which has over 6,000 members, is one every in-house lawyer should join, according to Roth. “Substantive knowledge is table stakes. That’s not to say it’s not important.

But you’re expected to have substantive knowledge to get you to the table in the first place,” he explains. “Our focus is on the other side of the equation: the additional skills required to thrive in an in-house position.” The goal is to grow LDM by five percent this year.

After the Annual Meeting, Roth returned to Knoxville and his day job at JTV. The company sells its

products in all 50 states through a nationally televised broadcast, similar to the home shopping network, and on [its website](#). The company is unique because it's a hybrid of retail and media. A typical jewelry retail operation wouldn't have to deal with FCC compliance issues for a live broadcast or secure space on a satellite for its programs.

There's an international element as well. JTV has a large office in Bangkok, and smaller offices in Jaipur, India, and Hong Kong, because so much of its gemstone and jewelry inventory comes from Asia.

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Roth oversees a legal department of eight people. The compliance team makes up half of that, plus three lawyers, and Roth. While he has the substantive skills, honed over his years in private practice and in-house, much of his time is spent managing his team.

He is a natural fit to lead the LDM Committee. Part of the committee's mission is to help its members grow as leaders and develop their soft skills, enhance their management skills, navigate office politics, and deal with the other non-legal challenges they face. For example, at last year's Annual Meeting, Roth organized a program on grit and resilience, which was presented to a packed house. It featured Anne Brafford, a lawyer who had gone back to school to earn her PhD in positive psychology. "In-house practice presents special challenges as we navigate inside our organizations. We're also in a profession that has problems with depression, substance abuse, and other issues. So on several levels, it's important to build skills like these. Enhancing our grit and resilience is a key part of our professional development," he says. "That's part of our core mission at LDM-equipping our members to reach the next level because they're moving beyond just being substantive experts."

A lifetime volunteer

Roth now claims Tennessee as his home after living in the state for over 20 years, although he was raised in the Midwest. He was born in Ames, Iowa and spent time in Manhattan, Kansas, both college towns where his father, a university professor, taught. During his high school years, his family relocated a final time to Knoxville so his father could teach at the University of Tennessee.

Roth's inability to make the basketball team was a factor in his eventual career choice. Instead of sports, he chose debate and speech competitions. Already a strong writer, he thought, why not get paid to do these things for a living? Taking advantage of his father's position at the University of Tennessee, he enrolled there to study economics and later earned his JD from the George C. Taylor Law Center on the same campus.

He stayed close after graduation, signing on with the Knoxville office of Baker Donelson. Roth specialized in commercial litigation and intellectual property litigation. He was with the firm for 20 years and was very involved with the firm's management and its role in the community. While he enjoyed the responsibility, he also felt big firm life had lost an element of fun over the years.

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His journey in-house is a familiar classic. He was handling trademark litigation for JTV when its then-general counsel called Roth to see if he was interested in taking over upon his retirement. "I remember getting the phone call and thinking, 'Well, he's an old friend. I'll go and humor him. But there is no way I'm doing this,'" Roth recalls. As he thought more about it, he realized that he could

recapture some of the spirit of fun that had dissipated during his firm days.

A focus on collaboration keeps him engaged in his job. “You understand the nuances of the business in a way that somebody from the outside never really can,” he says, adding that working closely with his business colleagues, and figuring out what motivates them, allows him to think about how to achieve the goals of the company.

Getting to know... Stephen Roth

If you could share a meal with anyone from history, who would it be?

That’s a very hard question! I’ll say [Winston] Churchill. The side benefit of that is you know when you meet with him, the bar would be open and you know the food would be really good.

Do you have any hobbies?

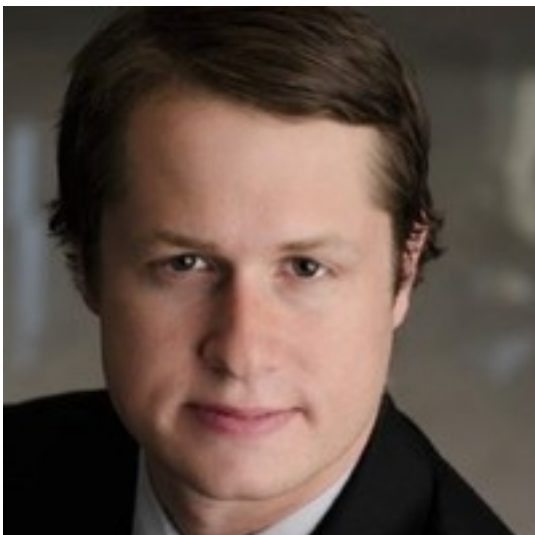
I feel like my main hobby is that I’m a parental transportation unit right now. I have two daughters, one is 15 and the other is 11. They are involved in tennis, softball, and ice-skating, and they are all over the place all the time. Aside from that, I would say my main hobbies are travel and working out. I just love to travel, particularly in Europe.

Do you have any travel on the horizon?

I met my wife in Budapest, so we go back to Europe every year. We typically go back in June to visit her family. Her sister is a lawyer in Budapest and her brother is a doctor in her hometown, a town called Szeged. It’s right on the southern border. We will be there for about a week.

I’ve convinced my wife to give me a few “adventure days” away from her family — as nice as they are. Last year, my adventure days were spent in Berlin and we had a great time. I don’t know where we are going yet this year. But Lake Como in Italy seems to be leading the pack at the moment.

[Joshua H. Shields](#)



Editor

Association of Corporate Counsel