

Lessons Learned, Lessons Shared

Career Development



When ACC asked me to write the Career Path column for the ACC Docket, I was humbled to think that ACC felt I could provide information of value to its readers. However, as you will see through future columns, I have spent time trying to figure out “what makes me happy.” And I have concluded that, for me, it is, “adding significant positive value to those who have put their trust or love in me.” With that in mind, I have enjoyed trying to help others learn from what I have learned over my career. That can be through sharing with others, mentoring, leading teams, teaching the Corporate Counsel Institute at the University of Colorado Law School, or writing pieces for the ACC Docket (I think I am up to five feature articles now).

My career and life journey has not been one with a real plan or real structure. So don’t feel bad if you don’t have yours figured out. But about four years ago, I read Donald Rumsfeld’s book, Rumsfeld’s Rules, in which he outlined a list of “rules” he had developed while he was in Congress and working for three presidents. I thought, “Where is my list? Why haven’t I ever developed my list?” So I started. Through this column, my plan is to share my “Leadership Lessons.”

I am now 62-years-old and have been working for over 45 years. In my early teens I was cutting grass in my neighborhood, and at 16 landed my first fulltime job (during summers) as a park maintenance person.

I paid for my own college education by taking student loans and using the money I earned from several jobs, both during the school year and the summers. My total student loan debt was US$6,900 (a paltry sum compared to today’s loan debts)! To save costs, I graduated in three years from the

University of Michigan with a BS in applied mathematics, and minors in physics and astronomy. I started George Washington Law School a month or so before I actually received my Michigan diploma and graduated with a JD at the age of 23. After law school I was fortunate enough to have my employer, Pacific Northwest Bell, sponsor me for the Executive Business School program at the University of Washington and received my MBA in 1988.

I worked as a general counsel at four major companies, U S WEST Inc., Storage Technologies Inc., Fisher Scientific International Inc., and Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company (MassMutual). Each company was in a different industry, and I worked closely with six different CEOs. In addition, I have been responsible for areas as diverse as public policy, government relations, public relations, human resources, compliance, internal audit, facilities, real estate, business resources, and corporate marketing. And now I have moved out of law and I am responsible for technology and administration at MassMutual.

As my career progressed, I have been privileged to lead teams that have obtained significant positive results that have moved these corporations forward, benefiting stockholders or policyholders. In addition, 15 attorneys who have worked for me moved on to become general counsel. Hopefully, I have also mentored or assisted others to become general counsel or to otherwise lead and be successful in their careers. Nonetheless, without the help and support of others and my teams, I would not be where I am today.

I often find that as I am mentoring someone or working with one of my team members, I tell a story that includes a lesson. I have tried to capture those thoughts. And, as Will Rogers once said, “good judgment comes from experience, and a lot of that comes from bad judgment.” Therefore, many of my lessons are from decisions or mistakes I have made, interwoven with the tale behind them. In addition, I have been privileged to interact closely with many diverse and successful leaders who have either been my boss, my peer, or on the boards of directors where I have worked. Many of these leaders have shared learnings with me or otherwise provided me with their words of wisdom.

Over the last four years, I created my own “Leadership Lessons” (the list will continue to grow and evolve as I remember things and learn more). My plan for this column is to cover the major categories of the lessons I have learned, including in the areas of: leadership; developing the culture; people, talent, and teams; creativity and innovation; decision-making; diversity and inclusion; personal attributes to be successful; communication; strategy and plans; protecting assets; and how to lead a legal team. I will try to work in stories on how I was taught these lessons — lessons learned from impressive leaders, through great results — and those lessons only embarrassment and failure can teach.

By the way, I will finish this first piece with my first lesson: I would recommend you start to develop your own list.

Mark Roellig



Owner

mroellig PLLC

Mark Roellig was previously general counsel of four Fortune 500 companies and now advises in-house counsel as a mentor and career coach.