Leading by Serving

Interviews and Profiles





Noah Webster

GENERAL COUNSEL FOR MOBILITY SOLUTIONS

BLACKBERRY

Whether on the battlefield or in the courtroom, serving is important to Noah Webster. As BlackBerry general counsel of Mobility Solutions or standing up for his troops during his days as a US Army lieutenant, he prioritizes his team’s needs before his own.

Webster attributes his legal leadership method to his five years in the US Army. He began his military career as a cadet at the United States Military Academy, more commonly known as West Point. After graduating with an engineering degree, he served in the US Army as an Engineer Officer from 1995 to 2000.

He was stationed at Schofield Barracks on Oahu, Hawaii, which is rich in history, with military sites such as Fort Ruger at Diamond Head Crater and the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific. He deployed with a 17-soldier team to Kosrae, an island in the Federated States of Micronesia. There, he had “rewarding and enriching” experiences while leading the team’s efforts to nation-build infrastructure in support of a US treaty with the island nation. In fact, one incident inspired him to pursue law.

During the deployment to Kosrae, the medic’s personal laptop was stolen. As the officer in charge, Webster knew he had to help one of his own. He remembered hearing that the US government may reimburse the soldier since the theft happened while she was on duty. He went to work researching military regulations. Webster wrote a justification for her, and thanks to his help, she received the

value of her computer back. The lesson stayed with him. “It was important to me to advocate for the people under my care,” he says.

That spirit of selflessness and camaraderie has helped him lead each team that he has managed since his Army days. In his current role, he supports the AtHoc crisis-communication platform and a few other businesses that fall under the BlackBerry umbrella. AtHoc specializes in government contracting — a perfect fit for the former Army Captain and the newly reorganized company.

Like most technology companies, BlackBerry has transformed since its inception two decades ago. The Canadian corporation dominated the smartphone industry in the 2000s, first targeting business professionals then expanding internationally to the public a few years later. To meet market demand, they have recently pivoted from consumer-facing hardware, such as mobile devices, to software, such as cloud Enterprise Mobility Management (EMM) and BlackBerry Secure phone security software. In other words, they’ve gone back to their roots to focus on companies and added a modern — and in-demand — product: privacy and security management.

Webster has also strategically shifted his career to adapt and succeed. After law school, he was a litigator for a firm that represented BlackBerry. The company soon gave him an opportunity to work in their litigation department. The transition to in-house suited him. “I was drawn to having one customer going full throttle to develop and helping them with their mission,” he beams. Moreover, focusing on a single company helped him to better understand its culture and processes — an advantage that many outside counsel don’t have.

Under the guidance of BlackBerry’s general counsel, he has since moved from litigation into other areas. His litigation background, though, has helped him as he has progressed at BlackBerry. Not only because of his robust knowledge in risk mitigation, but also because he is an experienced litigator, which helps him prevent potential lawsuits. “When you’re negotiating a contract, [you’ll] know how this will look years down the road should litigation arise, and what types of arguments might be presented,” he explains. He shares his litigation knowledge in a monthly column on ACCDocket.com.

In each role that he takes, he stockpiles more skills to his arsenal. So far, he has added anti-corruption, privacy and security, M&A, commercial, and generalist experience to his repertoire. Though he might not use all these skills on a daily basis, he wants to be prepared for when the next challenge arises. And when it does, he’ll be ready and at his team’s service.

Getting to know… Noah Webster

I KNOW THAT YOU’RE BIG INTO READING AND YOU STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF HOW IT HELPED YOUR CAREER. WHAT BOOK ARE YOU READING RIGHT NOW?

I read *The First 90 Days* by Michael D. Watkins when I recently took on a new role with the Mobility Solutions team. The lessons in there aren’t just for the first 90 days. They’re really about having goals, having a direction, assessing what you’re doing, and executing to a fixed timeline.

To help you fit in immediately, *The First 90 Days* suggests that you promote or introduce yourself and tell people what you do. This avoids the issue of having to work with people who haven’t heard of you or don’t know what you do. So, I had usual initial calls and meetings with leaders and key individuals but also wrote an introductory email to the entire division. I mentioned how excited I was

to be on a team that has been so important to BlackBerry's legacy smartphone business and continues to be critical to overall corporate success. Then I explained what I, as counsel, can do for them. The message allowed me to hit the ground running with the support from everyone on the team and, to my surprise, was passed around at the C-Suite level.

DO YOU HAVE ANY UPCOMING TRAVEL PLANS?

Our family trip is skiing up in Whistler.

I surf as well, from my Hawaii days. When I visit AtHoc, which is based in Silicon Valley, I can sometimes fit in an extra day or two over the weekend to surf in Santa Cruz.

IF YOU COULD HAVE DINNER WITH ANYONE, LIVING OR DEAD, WHO WOULD IT BE?

Dwight Eisenhower. He's a family hero of ours. One of the stories about him is that he was put in charge of the first Army tank school back when tanks were introduced in World War I and every single one was needed for the fight. He was forced to teach the soldiers how to use tanks without having an operational one. To solve the problem, he had a training vehicle with a fake turret built on a flatbed truck chassis. He was very practical in the face of great challenges, and remained affable and gregarious throughout.

Karmen Fox



Web Content Editor

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