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Committee Spotlight: Jack Erkilla

Interviews and Profiles





Jack Erkilla

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, DEPUTY GENERAL COUNSEL, AND SECRETARY

Tell us about your background and your law department.

I am the senior vice president, deputy general counsel, and secretary for OneMain Holdings — the largest branch-based consumer lender in the country with a history going back more than 100 years. OneMain provides personal loans primarily to middle-income households through a network of more than 1,800 branches throughout the United States. I grew up in Wisconsin, but ventured east for law school at the University of Virginia, which provided an amazing collegial atmosphere and sense of history. I returned to Wisconsin after law school and practiced with a medium-sized law firm and a regional bank for 15 years before taking my current position at OneMain. I have broadened the scope of my practice over the years, currently managing a team of five attorneys who handle a wide range of employment, corporate governance, finance, securities, and M&A work.

What interested you in the in-house practice of law and how did you come to be an attorney at OneMain?

I knew early in my legal career that practicing in-house would be the best fit for my skills and interests. I have always been very organized and efficient, and enjoy developing preventive programs. There are plenty of opportunities for an in-house employment lawyer to work proactively in order to help his or her clients avoid problems and do the right thing.

After the bank I was working for was acquired, I saw that OneMain (then known as American General Finance) had an opening for an employment lawyer in Evansville, Indiana. During the interviews, I was very impressed with the knowledge of the human resources professionals and the company's focus on treating employees fairly. I knew it was a good match for me. I have been with OneMain for almost 18 years, and the ethical culture that permeates the company has never disappointed me.

What is the single greatest challenge that your law department is facing today, and how are you dealing with it?

In late 2015, we acquired OneMain Financial, and renamed ourselves OneMain in a transformative transaction that more than doubled our size. This resulted in a company that has management — and a legal department — spread over several offices in the Northeast and Midwest. Melding two corporate cultures that are similar in many ways, and yet very different in others, has been a challenge. I now report to a general counsel in Baltimore and have lawyers and paralegals working for me in both Evansville and Stamford, Connecticut. We work hard to keep the lines of communication open despite not being in the same location. Of course, I travel a lot more nowadays. Since OneMain is a financial services company, I would be remiss not to mention the seismic change in the regulatory environment caused by the US Dodd-Frank Act and the US Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. Most lawyers in the department have to deal with some aspect of Dodd-Frank on an almost-daily basis.

In October 2016, you were elected as chair of the Employment and Labor Law Committee. How did you get involved initially?

I joined ACC in 1995, and have always appreciated the wide array of resources that I have access to. I have found it to be the best trade association for in-house counsel. After several years of taking

advantage of the numerous resources available through ACC, I felt that it was time to give back. I volunteered for the Employment and Labor Law Committee's (ELLC) Membership subcommittee. After that, I spent a few years co-chairing the webcasts subcommittee, and eventually I was asked to take a leadership role. The ELLC is organized by great leadership and contains many committee members who are willing to help other in-house counsel. This year, we have 25 subcommittee co-chairs who have volunteered their time and expertise.

What are some of the ways that the Employment and Labor Law Committee provides value to its members?

The ELLC is dedicated to providing resources for both experienced employment law attorneys and those who do not have the luxury of practicing employment law fulltime. Every company has employees, and eventually someone in the law department has to deal with employment issues. I believe that we provide best-in-class resources to our members, from monthly calls on key legal developments to regular webcasts and InfoPAKs. We are fortunate to have a great sponsor, Jackson Lewis, which always goes above and beyond its sponsorship obligations, including providing a Legal Quick Hit (LQH) for each of our monthly calls, sponsoring webcasts, and contributing several other resources. I think that we have one of the most active eGroups at ACC. We also work to improve our resources every year. We added a new subcommittee last year, and this year we are looking at forming a new subcommittee to address issues related to the management of employee leaves, which is a hot topic.

What substantive practice issues does your committee address?

The ELLC provides resources for virtually every area of labor and employment law through LQHs and policy reports at our monthly meetings, as well as through written resources, webcasts, and annual meeting programs. Last year, we published InfoPAKs on wage and hour issues as well as OSHA inspections. We also have our own program "track" at the annual and mid-year ACC meetings.

How has the ELLC help you in your career?

Being active in the ELLC has given me the opportunity to meet and work with great lawyers from all over the country, and to learn from their experiences.

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