

My Take: Change is the New Normal

Career Development


NEW
NORMAL



The year is winding down, and what a year it has been. We've seen many challenges in 2020, both professionally and personally. We've also seen how resilient and innovative people can be. In fact, we saw lots of innovation just last month with ACC's first completely virtual Annual Meeting. This meeting was especially exciting for me as it marked my first as ACC's incoming board chair.

I hope you had the opportunity to join us for the dynamic speakers, sessions, and networking. If not, you can find recaps and more, as well as information on upcoming programming, on ACC.com. The format of this year's meeting was a big change, yet many of us have gotten used to working and playing virtually — attending everything from staff meetings and conferences to happy hours and birthday parties via platforms like Zoom, Google Meet, Jitsi Meet, Skype, and Teams. With disruptions to our normal routines, we've found ways to get the work done, connect, and move forward. Now, if we could only master the mute/unmute button! As the adage goes, change can be good. For me, being named your new chair is a change and a challenge I very much look forward to.

I'm excited to carry on the great tradition of exceptional ACC leadership that came before me, including the work of our Immediate Past Chair Anneliese Reinhold. Under Anneliese's leadership, ACC saw global membership grow to include more than 45,000 members, and as of last month, those members represented 97 countries. Further, during her year as chair, approximately 7,000 new members joined the association.

As chair, I will work to continue expanding our global membership. It is vital to our practice that we be connected to a diverse network of in-house counsel all over the world. In fact, I became more

involved with ACC when I was living and working in Singapore. One of the first things I did upon arriving was to ask ACC if there was a local chapter. At the time, the answer was no. A group of loyal ACC devotes who were also living in Singapore got together to work with ACC and eventually formed the ACC Singapore Chapter, of which I proudly served as founding president. As you can imagine, through my work with the ACC Singapore Chapter, and ACC staff and members, my connection to this organization grew immensely.

As ACC members, not only do we have access to frequently updated and on-trend professional resources, but we also gain access to an always-growing network of in-house counsel who are working on issues that are like the ones that cross our own desks. With ACC in your professional arsenal, you never have to face a challenge alone. This has proven true during recent months as we all dealt with the realities of COVID-19. I know ACC content like the COVID-19 Resource Center has helped me in my current role.

As we continue to face the challenges presented by the global pandemic, there are often more questions than answers about how the world, the workplace, and organizations will adjust. I will work with Veta, ACC staff, and the rest of the board of directors to continue to adapt and innovate as we head into 2021. We don't have control over many of the things that have changed for in-house counsel or for ACC, but I have confidence in this organization's strength and adaptability, as well as our absolute dedication to serving members.

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In addition to helping ACC navigate what we hope will be the end of COVID-19, I would like to share some of the goals I hope to achieve during my tenure as board chair. First and foremost, I will continue ACC's promotion of the Seat at the Table initiative. Since 2017, the association, led by Veta, has worked tirelessly to drive home the point that CLOs and GCs must have a seat at the executive table and direct access to the board of directors. The role of in-house counsel is evolving and expanding, with more and more being added to an already long list of responsibilities. If we are to effectively serve and advise our clients as these requirements continue to grow, we must have the tools and access necessary to be successful. According to the 2020 ACC CLO Survey, we are making progress: 80.2 percent of CLOs and GCs report to the CEO. This represents a 15.8 percent increase over 2018, and I like to think that ACC's work in this area has something to do with that growth. However, we can do more, especially as it relates to non-US companies, and I look forward to helping us get to 100 percent.

In addition to supporting the work that is already being done with the Seat at the Table initiative, focusing on the CLO, the C-suite, and the board, I want to broaden the discussion to include all levels of the legal department. I invite you to think about what having a seat at the table means to you. If you are a regional counsel, perhaps it means being invited to your regional leadership meetings. If you are new to in-house, maybe it means becoming involved in projects early, and developing meaningful relationships that will help to improve outcomes. And outside of the office, what does a seat at the table look like for us as in-house counsel in our communities? How can we use our professional background, training, and expertise to impact the issues that affect the communities where we live and work? How do we, as in-house lawyers, come to the table to address racial and social injustice, gender equality, and justice for all human beings?

These are the types of questions that I look forward to discussing with you. ACC members bring many different perspectives, based on everything from years of practice to where we're located. In

fact, our individual “tables” are located around the globe. Aren’t we fortunate to belong to an organization that facilitates the exchange of ideas and resources across such a network?

As I round out a decade of active involvement in ACC, and an even longer tenure as a member, I step into the role of board chair with deep gratitude to all who have worked to make ACC what it is today. I look forward to working with you in the year to come, to continue grow, connect, inform, and help us all — general counsel, chief legal officers, and the entire in-house community — claim our seats at the table.

Jo Anne Schwendinger



Chief Legal & Compliance Officer & Secretary

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Jo Anne Schwendinger is the chief legal, compliance officer, and secretary of II-VI Incorporated. She serves as the chair of the ACC Global Board of Directors.