



Five Tips for Becoming a Better Lawyer from Brian Cabrera of NVIDIA

Skills and Professional Development



I recently caught up with Brian Cabrera who serves as senior vice president and general counsel at NVIDIA Corporation, a market leader in visual computing. Brian is an accomplished member of the bar as well as a genuine person and an engaging speaker. Cabrera has spent a considerable amount of time reflecting on his career path and articulated the following five principles that have helped him become the lead attorney at one of the world's most profitable hardware companies.

1. Be committed. "Chickens are involved, pigs are committed. Be committed." In Brian's breakfast metaphor, the chickens are involved — they contribute eggs — while the pigs are committed, as the bacon for the meal. He then suggested that for a company to achieve the best possible results its lawyers must be committed. "You are not just a lawyer. And you must not be just a passive observer. You should be dedicated and committed. Your team's and clients' wins are your wins. Conversely, your team's and clients' losses are your loses. Lawyers should be part of the business strategy at each and every step. Accordingly, you need to actively participate to ensure that the company achieves the best possible results."
2. Understand the business. "At a minimum, you need to know your company's products and how they are marketed, how the company makes money and who your customers are. This knowledge must be deep, not just superficial. With this knowledge in hand, you will become a truly reliable and trusted business partner who knows how the sausage is made."
3. Develop good judgment. "Many people, including those who are not members of the bar, can locate statutes and find the applicable laws. Merely reciting the law is not a valuable skill. However, understanding and advising business partners about the practical implications of the law will create and add value. Good lawyers apply the law to achieve the best results under the circumstances. Also, try to develop creative and resourceful problem-solving skills. Everything you don't know should be treated as an opportunity to learn. Similarly, every unsolvable problem is an exercise in valuable creative thinking. You should wholeheartedly

seek and embrace these opportunities."

4. Be adaptable. "We all have insecurities (real or imaginary), disadvantages (self-imposed or societal), and unfavorable traits (self-created or inherited). These won't go away, regardless of one's gender, race or socioeconomic background. The key is to identify them and take corrective actions to make the most of your assets."

Cabrera said he has significant hearing loss in his right ear. To address this issue, his mother ensured that he sat in the front right corner of the classroom so he could face the teacher with his good left ear. To this day, he always tries to position himself to one's right or directly in front during the conversation, in order to hear the speaker better. Taking full advantage of his assets has served him well and has become part of his professional strategy.

5. Develop and maintain genuine relationships. "If you find yourself thinking: 'I'm competent and hardworking, what am I missing? Why am I not progressing as quickly as I would like?' chances are that a lack of genuine relationships — both internal and external — is the answer. So, make sure you connect, keep in touch, and develop relationships with peers, colleagues and clients. These relationships are resources that will differentiate you and help you excel."

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Olga V. Mack is a fellow at CodeX, The Stanford Center for Legal Informatics, and a Generative AI Editor at law.MIT. Mack shares her views in her columns on ACC Docket, Newsweek, Bloomberg, VentureBeat, Above the Law, and many other publications.

Mack is also an award-winning (such as the prestigious ACC 2018 Top 10 30-Somethings and ABA 2022 Women of Legal Tech) general counsel, operations professional, startup advisor, public speaker, adjunct professor, and entrepreneur. She co-founded SunLaw, an organization dedicated to preparing women in-house attorneys to become general counsels and legal leaders, and WISE to help female law firm partners become rainmakers.

She has authored numerous books, including *Get on Board: Earning Your Ticket to a Corporate Board Seat*, *Fundamentals of Smart Contract Security and Blockchain Value: Transforming Business Models, Society, and Communities*. She is working on her next books: *Visual IQ for Lawyers* (ABA 2024), *The Rise of Product Lawyers: An Analytical Framework to Systematically Advise Your Clients Throughout the Product Lifecycle* (Globe Law and Business 2024), and *Legal Operations in the Age of AI and Data* (Globe Law and Business 2024).