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Alexa King: A Self-Made Woman

Skills and Professional Development



"I know exactly which three dishes I want to try," says Alexa King with a smile after we greet and exchange niceties at a trendy Vietnamese restaurant in Mountain View, California. King is the EVP, general counsel and corporate secretary of FireEye, a leading network security company. From her well-cut, bright red blazer to her polished executive presence to her funny yet intimate stories, it is quickly evident that King possesses a unique mix of determination, candor and humor. Before you know it, you'll be laughing as if you have known King for decades, even if you've just met her.

King is the daughter of refugees who escaped Hungary when it was under Soviet rule. Like all refugees, her parents gave everything up and started from scratch in the United States. This meant that although King was born in the US, she didn't escape the many trials and tribulations of the immigrant experience. King had to work harder, smarter, and faster to earn the scholarships required to attend the private schools in Manhattan, Harvard and then Berkeley School of Law. She is the first and only person in her family to go to college.

King proudly says that she loves her job. "Given how much time we spend at work, I want to have the most interesting, most challenging, most fulfilling job possible and to be the best at it that I can." One could conclude she has met those goals. She has overseen two IPOs, a billion dollar acquisition, and the dismissal of the first and only lawsuit ever brought by the SEC over Regulation FD during her time at three fast-growing technology companies — Siebel Systems, Aruba Networks and FireEye.

When asked what other job she would love, she answers without hesitation, "Being a stay-at-home mom" to her nearly three year old twin daughters, Anya and Katya.



A determined activist

In her parents' eyes, King was also a rebel. Her form of rebellion in the academic sphere was designing her own major — a "first of its kind" Eastern European studies program at Harvard where she studied Hungarian history and learned Russian. "My dad would say, "We escaped. Why are you studying that? How about Accounting?" She continued her rebellion, much to her parents' chagrin, by pursuing her passion for social justice through her work with Planned Parenthood and the ACLU. King also served as a judicial clerk to the progressive and pioneering Supreme Court of Hawai'i justice who penned *Baehr v. Lewin*, the first US court opinion seeking to legalize same-gender marriage, and then spent many years working for marriage equality. "My parents frequently asked why I couldn't just pick a pragmatic path. They were relieved when I became a lawyer. But to me, advocacy is activism. Now, I apply my passion to helping innovative technology companies grow."

A woman who perfected her pitch

Knowing how and when to ask the right questions is important to King. During the interview process, she asks founders, CEOs and Board members, "What does General Counsel mean to you and how is it different from a lawyer?" It's possibly the most important thing King does to start off on the right foot: set expectations in a collaborative way. Through this process, King has discovered that knowing you need a GC and truly understanding a GC's value are two very different things. King believes that if you can demonstrate from that very first conversation how a GC can be a true strategic business partner who brings value to all areas of the organization, the seed you plant will reap great rewards.

"I explain that my goal is to help identify and solve problems to enable a business to expand and be successful. I talk about being proactive rather than reactive. I emphasize that the concepts of "generalist" and "counselor" coexist in the title for a reason, and we talk about what that means to us and to the company's future." Having the CEO's buy-in from the very beginning is the foundation to success. So is open communication and strong collaboration with other leaders within the

organization. Within her first week at a new company, she meets with the heads of each department, asks them about their main challenges, and immediately begins brainstorming how her role and department can provide solutions.

A general counsel who seeks to add value

King believes that executing on legal initiatives and ensuring that the Legal Department is solution-oriented are the basics for any GC. King stresses the value that being approachable and accessible can bring to building relationships with internal clients — and even between internal clients. When asked what she sees as one of the most important contributions a GC can make, King says, "Ensuring right hand/left hand coordination. I'll have a great conversation with someone in product management about their organization's needs. Shortly thereafter, I'll be with a field rep, discussing a challenge that our sales team is facing. Often the two will be talking about the same problem from a different perspective. I can identify potential overlap, not to mention synergy, and bring the two together to collaborate." Acting as the trusted consigliere, building relationships based on an understanding of both the company's and her clients' needs, and continuing to reinforce the expectations she sets at the outset have resulted in King's success. This hasn't gone unnoticed in the broader legal community: Under King's leadership, FireEye was named the Best Legal Department by The Recorder in October of 2015 and King was named the Best GC by Silicon Valley Business Journal/San Francisco Business Times in March of 2016.

A trusted board advisor

Over the last decade, King has worked with and advised boards of directors in a variety of capacities at multiple companies in different stages of maturity. She sees transitioning to a board seat herself as a potential next step. "I have experience leveraging my skills and expertise to help build companies and take them to the next level," she said. "I would love to bring that experience to the boards of other fast-growing companies hoping to expand and scale."

It's easy to imagine King as an invaluable asset to a company's board: she is naturally collaborative, well-versed in advising on rapid growth, and an expert on corporate, compliance, governance, and compensation issues. In addition, one of the hottest topics today is data security as companies (and their boards) are working overtime figuring out where their security gaps are and how to build breach-proof cyber security. King is uniquely positioned as a business expert in this subject. In fact, she may find her expertise come into play in her next position. With her history of self-made success and her versatile skillset, King is poised to take her next step.

[Olga V. Mack](#)



Fellow

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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).

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Katia Bloom is a fast-paced and strategic commercial lawyer. Currently, she is the associate general counsel at ForgeRock. Previously, she headed up legal for Avira, Inc., was a founding partner at E Squared Law Group, advising many start-up clients and was in-house counsel at Anesiva. She is actively involved in the Association of Corporate Counsel and a number of organizations promoting

women in the legal profession.