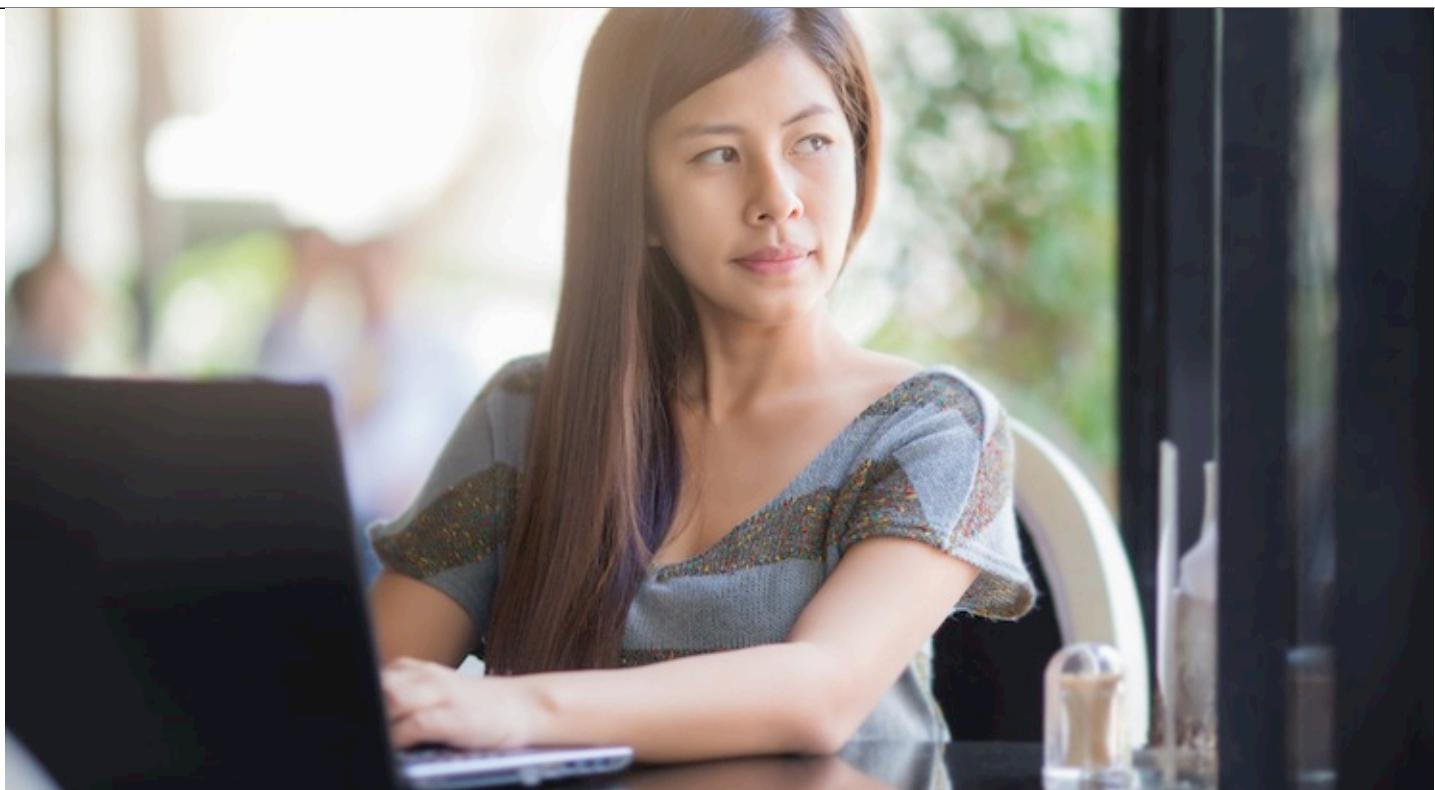




Opt-In to Mindfulness: How Alexandra Ross Champions Privacy

Technology, Privacy, and eCommerce



The most memorable compliment Mariah Panza Garcia, general counsel of the Conco Companies, has received from her teenage daughter, then elementary school-aged: "You are always the best dressed mom when you drop me off at school and when I grow up I want to wear clothes like you." Garcia explains, "It meant a lot to me because as a working mother with a high velocity career I always wonder how well I am doing as a mother and whether I do enough with my daughter. So, it is very satisfying to hear that she loves me just the way I am."

For Garcia, "just the way I am" means having a lot on her plate! Conco is an industry leader that has been delivering premium concrete services throughout the Western United States since 1959. Garcia joined Conco ten years ago as its first in-house attorney and created Conco's legal department. As the department leader, Garcia oversees and offers expertise on company transactions, negotiates public, and private contracts; partners with outside counsel for the supervision of litigation; and collaborates with the Conco executive team for risk management, strategic planning, HR compliance, and real-estate management.

In addition, Garcia takes an active role in managing Conco's diverse commercial real estate portfolio. In that capacity, Garcia is charged with managing land acquisitions and sales, partnering with industry professionals in real estate transactions, negotiating complex industrial leases in various states, and participating in the management and construction of new assets. For example, Garcia recently managed the acquisition of 100+ acres consisting of various parcels of land near Reno, Nevada and the accompanying lease-up of over 1,400,000 square feet with high-profile logistics-industry tenants.

So, how does Garcia — the sole general counsel and attorney at Conco — get it all done? What is her strategy for thriving at a construction company with over two thousand diverse employees, labor

unions, and complex legal issues? She has embraced the practice of collaborative team effort, or what her daughter would call s #squadgoals. “Squad Goals,” for those who don’t speak fluent Instagram, is an aspirational term that is widely used across social media. The hashtag is used to describe photos or concepts of one’s “ideal” group of friends, or “squad.” Although the hashtag is usually seen applied to pictures of celebrities (such as Taylor Swift’s famous “[squad](#)” of musicians and models), one’s #squadgoals can include anything: traveling the world with friends, completing a marathon together, or reaching professional goals. Garcia’s #squadgoals? Managing Conco’s multitude of legal risks.

The hashtag has popularized the use of the word “squad” to describe any group with a common goal and bond. Squads are dependable, dedicated, and supportive. Social media is often used to share pictures of one’s “squad,” which fosters a group pride and appreciation. The idea of being a “squad” creates a group bond and inspires its members to be part of something greater than themselves. This concept was new to Garcia. “I naturally like to work alone and in the past I didn’t have a concept of ‘squad’ or ‘squad goals,’” she explains. “I didn’t play team sports or join a sorority growing up. I just got things done by myself. That was the way to get things done.” Soon after Garcia joined Conco, however, she realized that having a reliable team is not just a survival strategy for her role as a sole general counsel. Developing and depending on a team also makes her a better attorney, with a much more exciting legal practice.

“It took a while to fully appreciate the practice of collaborative team effort,” explains Garcia. “I was recently inspired to get even better at it by my daughter and her friends, who do this so naturally — especially when they post on Instagram. They enjoy showing photos of themselves with their group or team. And I am so glad that my daughter is starting to see the importance of a group of people she can count on.”

Garcia admits that she’s a late bloomer when it comes to finding her squad. “I have evolved from the mindset of ‘doing things on my own is the best way to get things done’ to ‘collaborating with and learning from my peers’ enhances the value of my legal services and adds to my overall job satisfaction,” she explains. “Some learned this concept in high school by participating in team sports, college by joining sororities or sport teams, or law school by participating in study groups. I figured out the tremendous value of creating a meaningful squad only after I became a general counsel!”

Of course, learning to rely on a “squad” results in giving up control, which may be hard for attorneys who tend to be control enthusiasts. “At the end of the day, I love control. When I do things on my own, I have a lot of control and it is very satisfying,” Garcia observes. “I realized that alone I am limited and overwhelmed and that others have valuable experiences, points of view, and connections. And at the end, having a squad allows me to achieve goals faster with more optimal results. They make me a better, happier attorney. They also help me develop much deeper friendships and relationships with others.” Having a squad is a win for everyone!

Garcia’s squad at Conco is full of several internal collaborators. For example, she relies heavily on Conco’s human resources, contracts management and risk management teams. These internal stakeholders are instrumental in many day-to-day activities, from choosing and negotiating with vendors to triaging the response to critical, time sensitive issues. Garcia explains, “I work with the human resources and risk management teams a lot. We also attend the same seminars and enjoy each other’s company socially. So, when it is time to get stuff done we benefit from our individual strengths and collaborate seamlessly.” In fact, Garcia credits the strength of this internal collaboration for her work/life balance at Conco. “No one ever disturbs me on vacations,” she says. “When I am gone I have a reliable team that know how I work and whom to contact in my absence.

So, if anything happens they know what to do. The walls of Conco do not crumble in my absence because the team is empowered to succeed even if some members are absent.”

Garcia also considers her outside counsel to be a part of her squad. After all, a good relationship with outside counsel is a key to any general counsel’s success. “I work with amazing local firms that know Conco’s business and our culture. Some have been helping us well before I joined and have been instrumental in my success,” she observes. “Not only is it cost efficient, my outside counsel streamline the response and handle our issues in a way that requires little hand-holding.” Garcia also relies on outside counsel to work well with her internal squad members because “it makes the team more effective and efficient when we make an intentionally concerted effort.”

Finally, Garcia considers all of Conco’s vendors, including insurance vendors, to be critical members of her squad. “It is critical in our business to assess, prevent, and address risks in our business. So, the relationship with insurance industry professionals is very important and Conco’s risk manager and I spend a considerable time collaborating together,” she says.

Managing Conco’s legal risks is truly a group effort. Although it took her some time to embrace team collaboration, Garcia now credits her “squad” for being the network and support system central to her success. Garcia’s progress from “lone wolf” to do-it-all general counsel is the perfect example for any attorney seeking to harness the power of #squadgoals.

[Olga V. Mack](#)



Fellow

CodeX

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).