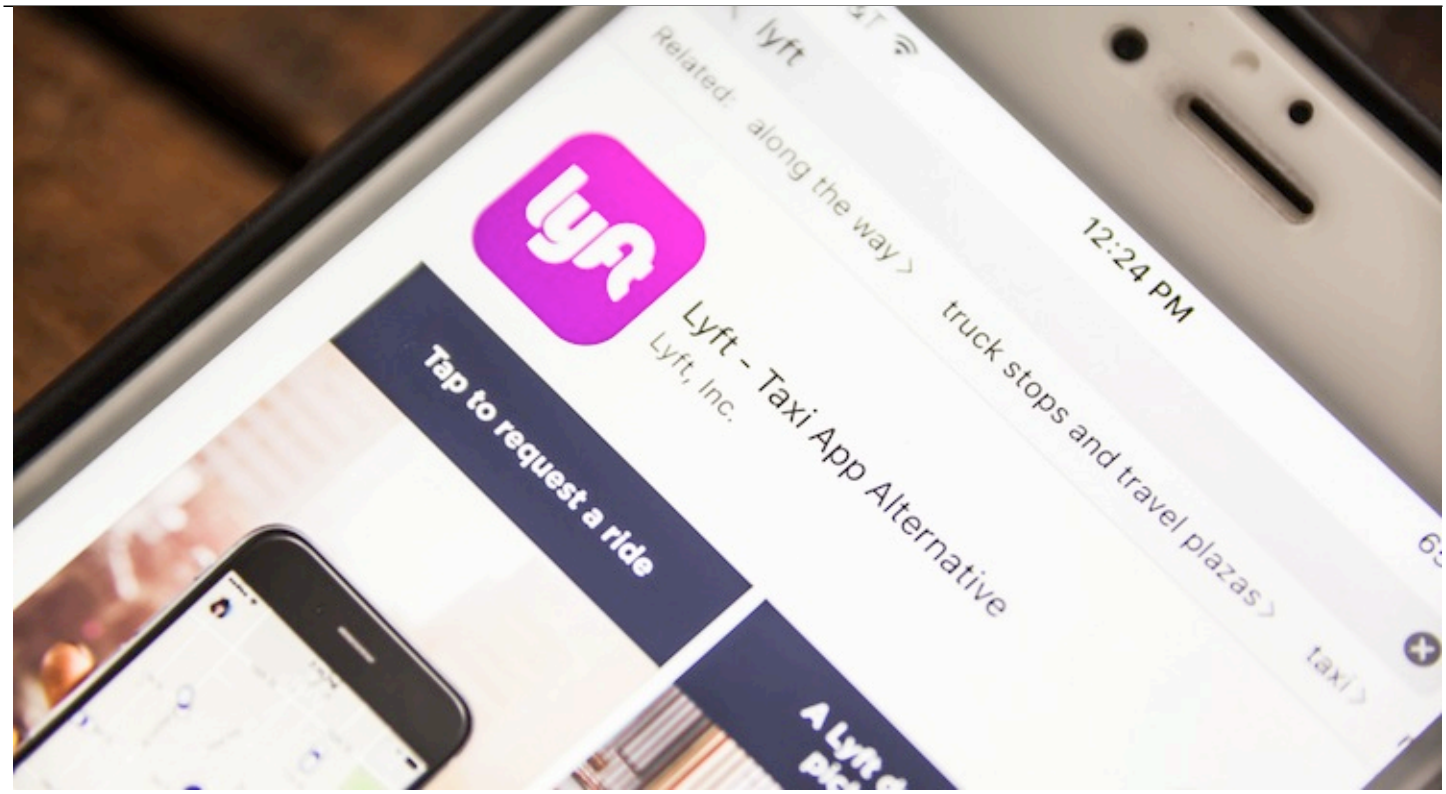


Proactively Building Relationships: Key Insights from Kristin Sverchek, Lyft's General Counsel

Technology, Privacy, and eCommerce



As the general counsel of a company at the forefront of a rapidly changing industry, it's interesting to learn that Kristin Sverchek credits a significant portion of her success to proactively building relationships with her team, key decision-makers within the company, and mentors from the legal community. Sverchek relies on each of these groups to help her make important decisions, avoid pitfalls, and — perhaps most importantly — provide a different and unique perspective. When Sverchek moved from a legal career as outside counsel to become Lyft's first attorney and general counsel, she instantly began building a relationship foundation that she conscientiously fosters to this day. This approach has been instrumental in Sverchek's success, as the company has grown from 30 employees to nearly 1,500 in the last four years.

Building trust with key decision makers

Sverchek's decision to join Lyft was rooted in the positive dynamic that she established with Lyft's co-founders and executives even before she joined the company. "I cannot stress enough how important it is to really like the people you're working for," Sverchek says. "From our initial conversations and to this day, I have a tremendous amount of respect for John [Zimmer] and Logan [Green]. Even when we go through any number of business challenges, the personal relationship I've built helps put things in perspective." Sverchek credits mutual respect as one of the key reasons she has never stopped enjoying her job. "In addition to becoming integrated in all parts of Lyft's business early on," Sverchek reveals, "I actively maintain relationships with Lyft's co-founders and executives so that they come to me and my team when important decisions need to be made, and I can continue to be an integral part of the strategic shifts within the company."

This proactive relationship-building approach has also allowed Sverchek to openly discuss certain decisions that touch upon sensitive subjects, such as diversity. Lyft is quite focused on diversity both

in terms of its workforce and the customers it aims to serve. Relying on her strong relationship with the company's founders, Sverchek has been instrumental in ensuring Lyft's senior leadership includes women. To date, Lyft's senior leadership includes quite the impressive female roster: Kate Sampson, VP of Risk Solutions; Melissa Waters, VP of Marketing; Veronica Juarez, head of Enterprise Initiatives and former director of Government Relations; Komal Kirtikar, director of Marketing; Gina Ma, director of Marketing Strategy and Operations; Amy Fox, director of Partnerships; and Tali Rapaport, VP of Product. Using her proactive relationship-building approach, Sverchek was able to raise this important issue, garner the support it required, and help establish Lyft as a diversity leader in the tech community.



Focusing on the legal team

Sverchek was fortunate that Lyft hired a general counsel early in the company's development, allowing her to ingrain the legal department into the corporate DNA. While there were several legal issues Sverchek presumed would be her focus when she took her job, as the company grew at a rapid pace, Sverchek needed to build a team who could help her prioritize the large volume of issues piling up on her proverbial plate. "By being a key player from the very beginning, I could build internal credibility that would have been much more difficult to obtain had I joined the company later in the game, which was very important in the success of the team early on. However, I took the same approach to building trust with the members of my team as I had with executives and key decision-makers. It all came down to relationships." As Sverchek built out a team of 18 lawyers, she knows she can rely on each individual to focus on the key issues, and advise her when something shifts in the regulatory environment that Lyft should be focusing on. "Since I invested into my team in the beginning, and continue to spend significant time making sure everyone knows and trusts each other,

and knows the company's mission, there is a cohesion on the team and a certain intuition that all of us share," Sverchek says.

This approach has also helped Sverchek proactively identify, both for herself and the legal department as whole, areas that are most likely to create problems at any given time. She regularly reassesses these areas to determine how to best approach them. As an example, Sverchek says, "there are so many practice areas, but we know that, for example, the state of arbitration law is key and so that's something my team hones in on. We always make sure to have a certain amount of base knowledge — especially on the issue of customer trust, liability and safety — and then team members focus on the topics that are of particular importance and in-line with their interests whenever possible."

Another example of the benefits of building proactive relationships is evident when Sverchek describes the way that legal interacts with the regulatory and government relations teams. "Initially, I was involved in every area of government relations and shifts in the regulatory environment. As the company grew, each of those departments developed into robust teams. However, my team works seamlessly across both the government relations and compliance departments, and they know that if something goes wrong, we will be a source of support. This type of alignment is only possible through proactive relationship building and maintenance," Sverchek explains.

Critical outside perspectives

Over the course of the last four years, Sverchek has seen so many novel issues play out in an industry that was akin to the Wild West, that she can now rely on her legacy knowledge to continue building respect for the legal department. However, this wasn't always the case. When Sverchek first took the job, like many first-time general counsel, she often second-guessed herself. Her main concern was whether she was making mistakes because she didn't know something. Sverchek was able to rely on the relationships she had built with several mentors in the legal community to help guide her. One such mentor was Belinda Johnson, chief business affairs and legal officer at Airbnb. When Sverchek asked her, "How do you know if you're making a wrong decision?" Johnson response was that, over time, a company's risk tolerance changes such that it is actually appropriate to make different decisions at different points in time. "Belinda's advice allowed me to redefine the word 'mistake.' The reality is that sometimes you're not wrong, but rather, a company's risk tolerance changes," Sverchek explains. "Exposing a company to risk in its early days sometimes just isn't that big a deal because you're focused on getting a product to market and identifying which areas are lacking. Obviously, as the company matures, exposure takes on a whole new meaning." This more flexible approach has helped Sverchek stay confident in her decisions and navigate uncertainty.

Sverchek continues to rely on key mentors to provide her with a different perspective. Considering this is Sverchek's first in-house counsel job, these relationships have allowed her to successfully navigate the regulatory environment while tackling a significant amount of litigation, and dealing with the day-to-day legal issues of a rapidly-evolving technology company. As Sverchek enthusiastically points out, "None of us could do these kinds of jobs alone, and I've relied on advice from a variety of sources, including general counsel who have guided their companies through similar uncharted territory." Sverchek's proactive commitment to the people around her both at Lyft and in the legal community has helped her succeed across the board and, as a bonus, has garnered her a level of job satisfaction that would be hard to imagine without such a robust support system.

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