



3 Ways to Build a Professional Brand Beyond Your Job Title

Career Development



As an in-house lawyer, it can be easy to get into a reputational rut at work. After working at one company for a while, you become known merely as “so-and-so, from legal.” But there are great career benefits to building a reputation in your own right at work. By becoming more visible and memorable to your co-workers, beyond your department or title, you’ll be able to revitalize your career, access more opportunities, and make valuable connections. How can you start? Try these three simple ways to manage your reputation.

1. Answer greetings intentionally

Every “How are you?”, “How are you doing?”, “What’s up?”, or “What’s new?” is an opportunity to connect, share information, build your reputation, be useful, and stand out. We often answer these questions with the expected “Great,” “Good,” “Well,” and “Okay.” But to really make the most of small talk, consider a more complete or responsive answer.

For example, when someone asks “How are you?”, actually share a recent success: “I feel relieved! I just had an important meeting with the counsel of our big prospective client. While not everything went according to plan, my improvisation skills have improved and days of preparation have paid off. What’s new with you?” Note how in just one answer, you came across as transparent, hardworking, and pleasant. Make sure you don’t come across as boastful, and always make sure to ask about the other person — and actively, earnestly listen! This approach could help you get to know others better, become more relatable, develop mentorship relationships, encourage dialogue between departments, and improve communications among ranks.

Another great example response: “Two days ago, I presented a creative solution to the competitor litigation. Our GC appreciated my creativity and asked me if I would like to present it to the directors

at the next board meeting. I have never presented to the board. Do you have any tips? I can certainly benefit from your amazing experiences.” By complimenting the other person and asking for their advice, you instantly make a connection, while making your co-worker feel valuable and appreciated.

2. Change your setting

It is not unusual for an in-house lawyer to feel isolated or stuck at a certain practice or problem. Consider changing your setting by joining a cross-departmental corporate group, event, or initiative. Not only is this an opportunity to meet people outside your normal circles (and therefore, answer even more “How are you?” questions), it is also an opportunity to educate others about your skills, be helpful, and network without leaving your company’s campus. Once you have a discussion flowing, you will be amazed at what you will learn about the company and its direction, stakeholders, and perceptions.

You can also change your settings in other ways. For example, I found that rotating the location of my desk for just an hour once a week expanded my network and helped me build relationships with my co-workers. At least once a week, I would schedule working on a couch or at a communal table in another department. I found that working at a new physical location, such as marketing, engineering, sales, HR, and other departments, has encouraged my internal clients to talk to me, bring me new questions, and see me as relatable and approachable. This interaction also helps me understand what is coming. Ultimately, just like with real estate, “location, location, location” matters. If you want to foster a change in your reputation, assignments, or opportunities consider changing your location, even if just temporarily.

3. Learn a new skill, technology, or method

Will blockchain affect your industry? Will artificial intelligence change the way you practice law or interact with your clients? To keep your reputation as an informed, trusted advisor, consider learning about these emerging skills, technology, and methods. This will give you a reason to reach out to professionals in your organization — in or outside of the legal department — with whom you normally don’t cross paths. In the process, you will learn more about the company, be helpful to others, become an innovator who embraces change, and ultimately shape the company’s future.

I’ve also found that my non-legal colleagues love sharing how they spend their days, the products and initiatives they are building, and the challenges they are trying to solve. Simply asking, “I would like to better understand what a product manager does — what’s your most exciting project?” can lead to a productive exchange. This learning and relationship building does not always happen during normal business interactions. After all, many professionals enjoy talking about themselves and their projects. It is not unusual for these conversations to become full product demos and learning opportunities that you didn’t know about before.

By branching out and building a reputation outside of their legal roles, in-house counsel can access more opportunities and truly connect with their internal clients. Making these connections through intentional conversation, changing workspaces, and learning new skills will also make you a more effective lawyer. Becoming well-known for being approachable, helpful, and engaging is as simple as these three easily implemented techniques.

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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).