


# My Take: Listen and Be Heard

**Career Development**



Your personal brand matters. To have impact and make a difference as in-house counsel, you must not only be a good lawyer. You also need to be respected, trusted, and heard. Improving your visibility and influence is important to your continued growth, no matter where you are in your professional journey, but especially as you are starting your in-house career.

In a recent article, 10 Skills Today's In-house Counsel Need, Executive Coach and Consultant Amii Barnard-Bahn notes that financial acumen, records and information management experience, and project and change management expertise are necessary skills for success. Also on her list are two intangible qualities: executive presence and developing influence. How do you enhance your executive presence, and in turn your visibility and influence?

As an ACC member, you have access to several resources on the subject, as well as a connection to a network that can help you throughout your professional journey. In this column, I'll highlight a few ACC resources authored by members of your in-house community and subject matter experts, that can help new-to-in-house counsel strengthen their position within their legal departments.

The foundational skills of in-house law include knowledge of your industry and the laws, policies and legal and business risks that affect it. In Barnard-Bahn's article, she suggests that we cultivate a "VUCA" (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous) mindset. In other words, we need to be aware of newly surfacing risks and potential threats to our organizations in order to provide forward-looking advice to our clients. While it would have been difficult to predict the confluence of challenges that 2020 brought, we can better prepare ourselves for risk events by thinking through and developing contingency plans and policies related to worse-case scenarios or "Black Swan" events. This process requires in-house counsel to develop relationships with and learn from subject matter

experts, and to be willing to address hard issues head-on. This means not shying away from tough discussions concerning potential risks to our organizations.

5 Ways In-house Counsel Can Influence the Right Tone at the Top

- In times of crisis, it's critical for organizations to make sure that law and ethics are an integrated part of the business sustainability strategy.
- Legal counsel need to work in partnership with colleagues to be effective, and influence starts with investing in key relationships.
- In times of operational cutbacks, the law department may need to establish a few key priorities and align those with a solid business case.
- It's critical to have a purposeful message that is carried through the organization, one that attracts, inspires, and expresses gratitude for what is being done right.
- By working on these five key areas, in-house counsel can work to ensure that their organization moves forward lawfully and ethically.

In-house counsel should be front and center when it comes to partnering with the business to make hard decisions, and we must earn the right to occupy that forward position. Newer in-house counsel need to cultivate relationships, which includes first listening and learning from experienced colleagues, so that trust can naturally follow. Showing a willingness to grow both substantive and soft skills, while demonstrating an ability to adapt and respond positively and effectively to feedback, is a bedrock of building trust.

Once trust is established, it's time to increase your visibility across the organization. A recent article published by ACC Australia outlined Five Strategies for Building Your Presence. While the article focuses on senior leadership, the tips also work for lawyers, at any stage in their career, who aspire to leadership roles. The tips include being authentically you; investing in professional development; and being supportive, encouraging, and empowering.

If you prefer your resource to have an audio component, try the webcast, 6 Strategies to Help Build Your Influence, which is intended to help you connect, convey, and convince others. The strategies outlined in the webcast will assist in creating the influence you need to change minds, behaviors, and outcomes. The article, More than an In-house Lawyer: Building an Executive Presence, explores how to create a lasting impression through consistent engagement with members of your leadership team. It highlights ways to show confidence, earn influence, and cultivate trust.

What is the result of increasing your visibility and influence? Increased responsibility. If it's time for you to take on more responsibility, access this on-demand masterclass, How Promotable Are You? Using the Five Key Elements of Promotability for In-House Legal Professionals, to see how likely you are to be promoted today, then create a plan to make yourself more promotable tomorrow.

As ACC Chair, I am committed to providing resources and support to members of the legal department, at all levels, who aspire to taking a seat at the leadership table. We all have a voice, and how we amplify it matters. I hope the resources and tips I shared are helpful. That said, I'd love to hear from you. What advice can you offer your in-house colleagues when it comes to enhancing their personal brand, and in turn their visibility and influence? I would love to share your

thoughts in a future column!

## More resources

The In-house Influencer

- *ACC Docket* article on an in-house lawyer turned social media influencer.

TED Talks **on Professional Development & Leadership**

- How I Stumbled Upon a Career Strategy Running a Marathon by Ed Paulis
- Bridge Your Past Experiences to Grow by Andrew Ting

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Jo Anne Schwendinger is the chief legal, compliance officer, and secretary of II-VI Incorporated. She serves as the chair of the ACC Global Board of Directors.