2022 ACC Top 10 30-Something: Olesja Cormney

Interviews and Profiles

The ACC Top 10 30-Somethings awards recognize in-house counsel between the ages of 30 and 39 for their innovation, approach to challenges, well-rounded perspectives, contributions to the in-house community, and pro bono and volunteer work.

Experiences of being a high school exchange student from Latvia and later an international undergrad student in the United States provided a path for Olesja Cormney to rise to her current role

as managing counsel at Toyota Motor North America, Inc. Olesja credits opportunities, hard work, and support from people who believed in her as instrumental in reaching her goals.

“The idea of being a lawyer first surfaced for me when I watched the movie A Time to Kill,” says Olesja, about the movie based on the John Grisham novel. “I watched this movie as a teen in Latvia and instantly knew I wanted to become an attorney. I wanted to make a difference in other people’s lives and be a part of something bigger than myself. How or when — I had no idea and knew no one who could help me, but I knew right there and then that one day I too would be an attorney. Dreams do come true."

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“There were no lawyers in my family. In fact, as a first-generation immigrant to the United States, I met a lawyer for the first time when I was 17. I remember asking him questions in my broken English yet with enthusiasm about his work and absorbing his every word. In undergrad, I shadowed an attorney who taught me a lot about the ‘how’ of being a lawyer. I am forever grateful for those lessons."

“At this point in my life, I am able to pay it forward to support those coming behind me,” she says, referring to mentoring college students, law school students, and young attorneys. She makes a point of telling them about the importance of building relationships and maintaining them in meaningful ways. It’s the same helpful advice she received from a mentor: “You can be the smartest person or the most hardworking one, but if you don’t have relationships, it is hard to succeed.”

Olesja also pays it forward with her work on the Dallas Bar Association’s Equal Access to Justice Campaign, an annual drive to raise critical funds to provide civil legal aid to low-income members of the Dallas-Fort Worth community. Co-chairing the campaign this year, Olesja helped exceed the fundraising goal by tapping into her network for support.

“Toyota and our legal department leadership have been extremely supportive of my work on the Equal Access to Justice Campaign. Toyota’s dedication to public service and pro bono work is unparalleled,” Olesja notes. “I’ve been given the flexibility and the resources to be able to serve our community in the most impactful ways.”

Olesja took a unique path to Toyota, attending law school at 28 and interning at the Kentucky Department of Public Advocacy, which helped develop her interest in public service.

She was the recipient of a diversity scholarship from Toyota that is offered to one law student each year while attending Salmon P. Chase College of Law. The scholarship gave her the opportunity to meet with Toyota’s legal team, which led to a series of internships and a full-time offer.

“During my internships with Toyota, I primarily focused on transactional work and got exposed to labor and employment [L&E] law for the first time,” says Olesja. “With a two-year-old daughter on my lap, I studied for the bar exam, excited for the opportunity that was ahead of me. When I started at Toyota, I continued to work with both the transactional team and the L&E team, but eventually shifted completely to L&E work.”

“The values of Toyota, and the company’s push for continuous improvement, and never accepting the status quo” is what attracted Olesja to the company. “There is always the need to continue to learn and stay on top of new developments,” says Olesja.

One of Olesja’s most significant challenges and successes at Toyota has been serving as one of the lead attorneys assisting the company with consolidating its headquarters operations in Plano, Texas. “This entailed supporting the move of thousands of our employees to Texas and the hiring of thousands more in the Dallas area, as well as helping establish the One Toyota culture. Toyota’s relocation to Plano, Texas, was a monumental task that was executed with so much consideration and respect for our people. I was proud to be a part of the team that made that happen for our employees.”

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Olesja has stayed on top of the changing global business environment and helped establish a global mobility program at Toyota, which supports team members in moving across the globe and working remotely.

Olesja collaborated with her counterparts at overseas Toyota entities to put in place secondment frameworks, which allow for seamless global assignments; created a state-of-the-art international business travel process; and streamlined the process for sponsoring workers on temporary visas.

The pandemic presented several unique challenges to Olesja, which started with supporting the Executive COVID Management Working Team. “We had to get away from our regular way of thinking and approach new challenges in innovative ways,” she says.

Among the pandemic challenges was collaborating with HR to create pandemic policies and procedures, including a return-to-work process. Olesja also drafted a hybrid work program; helped create programs for team members with school-aged children; worked with the communications team on internal and external COVID-related communications; and developed COVID travel guidelines.

Olesja doesn’t try to achieve the much-discussed work-life balance, because she prefers a work-life integration in a world where the boundaries of work and life are blurred. “I focus on scheduling and prioritization. I schedule all aspects of my life — work to-dos, personal and family commitments, self-care, and passion projects, which include my public service and pro bono work. I also write down my priorities on a monthly basis. Depending on what I have going on in a particular month, some parts of my life may need to take a back seat. I don’t try to do everything at the same time. There is just not enough time or energy. Instead, I focus on giving 110 percent to my priorities at the time.”

Q&A with Olesja Cormney

How has writing for the *ACC Docket* helped your career?

I definitely think that writing for the *ACC Docket* has elevated my standing as a legal professional,

has opened new doors, and has led to important professional connections. I have been invited to speak at a variety of conferences and events and to write for other publications as a result of my writing for the *ACC Docket*. And I have been recognized as a thought leader in the areas of diversity and inclusion (along with my colleagues who co-author articles with me under the name “DEI, Esq.”) and attorney wellness because of my involvement with *ACC Docket*. I am truly thankful to the *ACC Docket* staff for allowing me to amplify my voice on the topics I am passionate about.

What does outside counsel counsel need to know about you?

I crave technological legal solutions that add meaningful value, count on my outside counsel to think outside the box and understand what’s important to my internal clients, and expect the firms I work with to focus on DEI, pro bono work, and well-being of their attorneys and staff. I want to work with innovative thinkers with global mindsets who challenge what’s possible.

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