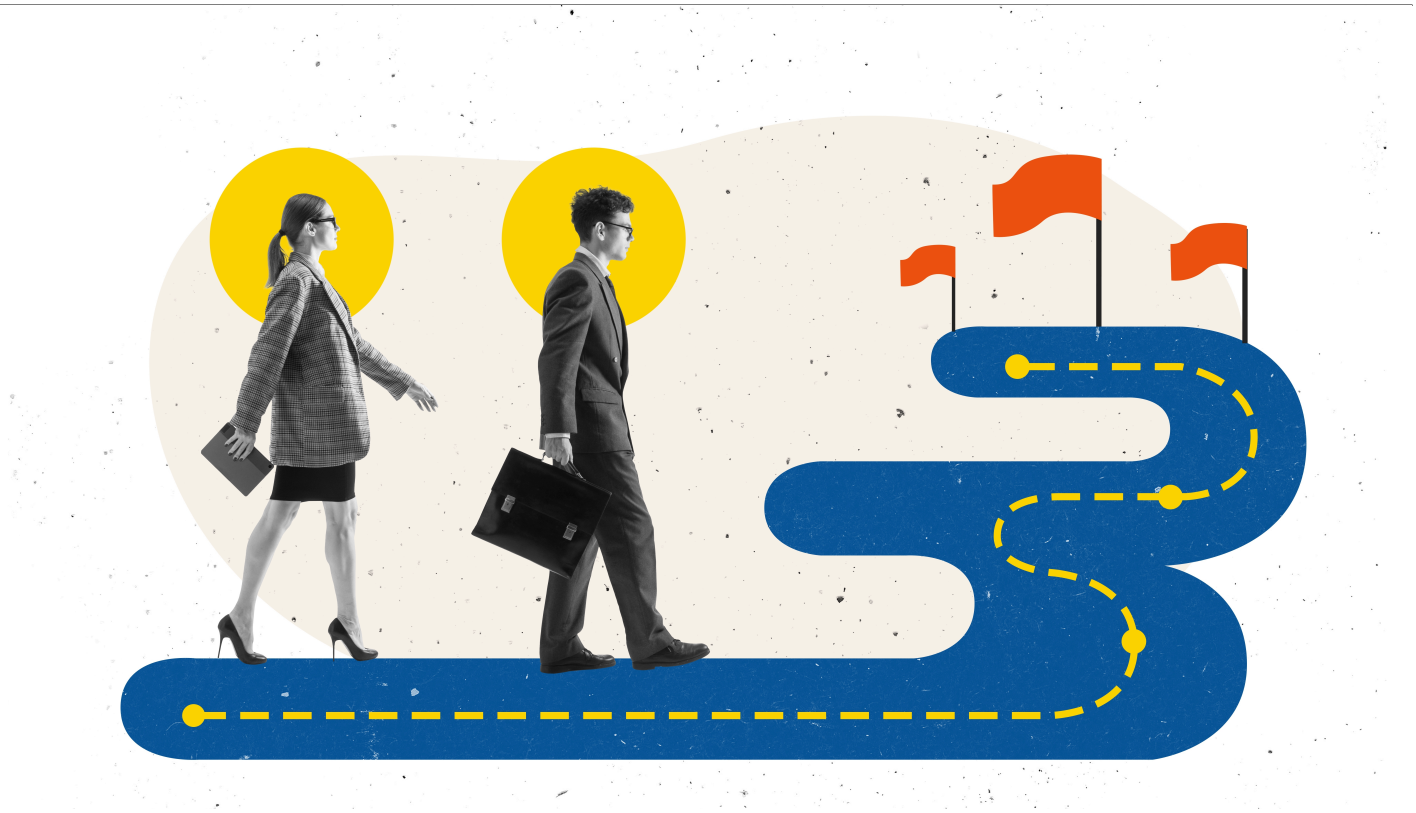


Your Launch Pad: Influence and Visibility: A Playbook for In?house Counsel

Career Development



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For many in?house lawyers, the biggest career challenge isn't the complexity of the work. It's that their best work often happens behind the scenes, invisible to the people who decide who gets the next opportunity.

Influence and visibility are not about self?promotion for its own sake. They are about being seen as a trusted advisor whose voice is sought out early on the decisions that matter most. The good news: These are **learnable skills**.

Whether or not you have a formal mentor, you can use your everyday conversations and career decisions as a practical lab to build the kind of influence and visibility that move both your organization and your career forward.

From "red?pen lawyer" to trusted advisor

One mid?level in?house counsel I coached was known as the "red?pen lawyer." Her contracts were airtight, but the business only brought her in at the eleventh hour — and often with resentment. She was technically excellent, but she was seen as a reviewer, not a partner.

With the support of a senior leader who became an informal mentor, she made three shifts:

- She asked to be included **earlier** in project discussions, explaining that she could help the team move faster if she understood the business goals upfront.

- She started her advice with **business questions** (“What are we solving for?”) rather than jumping straight to legal issues.

- She framed her guidance as **options with trade?offs**, instead of a single “yes/no” answer.

Within a year, the same colleagues who had avoided her were inviting her to strategy meetings. Her work hadn’t changed as much as her **perceived role** had.

A useful question for reflection or discussion:
Where are you currently being seen as a reviewer, and how could you become more of a partner?



Five practices to grow influence and visibility

Below are five practices you can use as a simple framework. They align with the five elements I use in my Promotability Index® career self?assessment. If you want a structured way to go deeper, you’re welcome to explore the free assessment as a complimentary tool for your development.

Clarify your in?house brand. Your brand is what people say about you when you’re not in the room. As in?house counsel, you want to be known for more than technical accuracy — you want to be known for judgment, practicality, and calm under pressure.

Reflection prompt: “If my colleagues described me in three words today, what would they be? What three words would I like them to use in two years?”

Understand the business you serve. Influence grows when you understand the business model as well as you understand the law. That means knowing your organization's strategy, key metrics, and risk appetite — and tailoring your advice accordingly.

Reflection prompt: "What are the top three to five business priorities this year, and how can my legal work directly support them?"

Show up with executive presence. Executive presence isn't about being the loudest voice. It's about **clarity, composure, and impact**. In practice, that looks like concise recommendations, a calm demeanor in tense discussions, and no surprises for your stakeholders.

Reflection prompt: "How do I come across in high?stakes meetings? What is one specific behavior I could change to increase my impact?"

Increase strategic visibility. Visibility comes from being present where consequential decisions are made and where cross?functional work happens. That might mean joining a project team, leading a brief update to senior management, or sharing a practical legal perspective at a business town hall.

Reflection prompt: "What is one cross?functional project, committee, or recurring meeting where my participation would add both value and visibility?"

Invest in everyday influence. Influence is built long before you need it. Take the time to understand your key internal stakeholders — what success looks like for them, how they are measured, and what keeps them up at night. Regular 1:1s, curiosity, and follow?through go a long way.

Reflection prompt: "Which three to five relationships, if strengthened, would make me more effective? What is one concrete step I can take with each person this month?"

Visibility through cross?functional work

Another in?house lawyer I worked with volunteered to support a major systems implementation. At first, she was asked simply to “check the contracts.” Instead, she joined working sessions, listened carefully to operational concerns, and translated legal constraints into workable options the team could use.

By the end of the project, she was the person business leaders called when they wanted to launch something new. Her title hadn’t changed yet — but her visibility and influence had. When a promotional opportunity arose the following year, she was an obvious choice.

Consider for yourself:
What’s one visible project or initiative where you could contribute your legal expertise in a more strategic way?

Putting it into practice

You don’t need a perfect plan to start. Choose one real situation — a meeting, a decision, or a stakeholder relationship — and apply one of these practices:

- Clarify how you want to show up.
- Prepare one or two business?focused questions.
- Frame your advice as options with trade?offs.
- Follow up afterward to reinforce the relationship.

Influence and visibility aren’t built in a single big moment. They’re built one conversation, one meeting, and one visible contribution at a time. The more intentionally you practice, the faster others will begin to see you — and rely on you — as the trusted advisor you already are.

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