

Your Launch Pad: Engaging In-house Counsel Leadership in 21st Century Organization

Career Development



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In today’s rapidly evolving, polarized, and global business environment, leaders need not only the support of their in-house counsel teams but also their leadership.

I am an ICF credentialed executive coach and leadership effectiveness partner for global organizations. I am often struck by the complex role that in-house counsel must play — and the stress

and challenges that it brings.

This article explores my conviction that to thrive as an in-house counsel, it is essential to embrace the ideas of the “controllable” vs. the “uncontrollable,” and “isolation” vs. “connection and awareness.”

The business context is one of an artist

Innovation is advancing faster than the legal landscape; the legal landscape differs internationally; uncertainty drives strong perspectives creating challenges for inclusive and collaborative and sustainably impactful environments. Today’s environment is often not one of rules to win by but rather resembles the world of artists with unlimited opportunities for creativity and learning, the uncertainty of lasting impact, surprising winners and business exits that range from global technology firms and global delights like Dubai Chocolate to caring local businesses to downsizing industries like big brick-and-mortar retail operations, transforming higher education institutions, and learning established industry leaders that strive to stay top of their game creatively ... what is a business, a product, an organization or industry that surprised you in the past five years?

The potential of the in-house counsel role

In this environment of global change and macro and micro polarizations, in-house counsel leaders have a unique opportunity to help build trust, shape legal landscapes, and facilitate diverse partnerships for their businesses and societies.

The authors of “How the GC Empowers the Board to Govern the Green Wave” point out the general counsel’s obligation to act in the best interest of the company, their many abilities to look at the company business through a wider lens of diverse stakeholders, facilitate transparency for trust, enable fiduciary responsibility at board level, and minimize the liability for greenwashing. The authors of “Data Breach! A Playbook for the First 72 Hours” highlight ways in-house counsel can build and lead from a space of trust for the organization and emphasize the importance of keeping an open mind as conditions change during crisis.

In-house counsel’s ability to build trust also offers indirect dividends to businesses like brand value in a more informed society about planet needs and opens them up to quantum performance where the trust the business builds can interact with the trust in the larger society and can create more value opportunities. We can find a good indicator for this in the 2026 Edelman Trust Barometer where researchers found that 43 percent of people trust businesses when they have an insular (reluctance to trust anyone who’s different from you) mindset vs 70 percent when they are more open-minded.



Hardships, disconnect, the need for resilience

While the 2026 CLO survey of the Association of Corporate Counsel showed that 84 percent of in-house counsel report to CEOs and are positioned better for strategic leadership participation, there is other research that indicate times when in-house counsel find it challenging to make their unique contribution. The research in "In-house lawyers and the price of saying no: ethical agency within cultures of conformity" found three general types of incidents where in-house counsel had to say no to the demands of other business leaders despite significant health toll ranging from stress to burnout and the risk of disagreeing being anything from being pressured to conform to getting demoted if not left with no other option but to resign.

Moreover, ACC's "The State of Stress Among In-house Legal Professionals" research found that more than one in five legal professionals rate their stress levels as moderate to severe driven by long work hours, full-time office vs remote hours not only giving reason to significant health risk, poor job satisfaction, and job mobility as highlighted in the research but possibly also diminished quality of decision making that can emerge in severely stressful conditions.

Lastly, the ACC's 2025 CLO survey indicated the necessity of increased business acumen in legal teams. ACC's 2026 CLO survey reported about how the in-house counsel faces chronic budget and resource constraints.

How well is the potential of the in-house counsel role recognized in the business community? Also, is the self-image of in-house counsel one that is transactional or strategic? Is the self-image of in-house counsel one that is lonely or interconnected and conducive to self-advocacy? How can in-house counsel identify themselves with a strategic role and advocate for their leadership impact?

Letting go of control and self-connection for connection

In my coaching experience, the disconnect between the potential and state of the in-house counsel leadership can be bridged and connected through a shift in two perspectives: one on the business context from controllable to uncontrollable and two, the human experience, from one that is isolated to one that is interconnected and aware.

Awareness and connection important for creative partnerships and negotiations

In an environment with fewer rules and the need for creativity, the ability to notice different resources, experiment, experiment, and partner or remain open to conversation have gained importance. These skills require a different level of energy, the unattached energy, and space of curiosity. For instance, the Global Mindset studies of Thunderbird School of Global Management found that energy is a significant leadership attribute when working internationally. The Global Digital Mindset research revealed the importance of a growth mindset. A growth mindset enables learning from experience and can benefit from the energy of an artist. How can the in-house counsel tap into this larger energy resource?

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Loving kindness – A sustainable source of energy for connection and creativity

Often, very hard matters are best addressed with kind and simple approaches. A resource I came across is the loving kindness meditation and way of thinking that unlocks a learning space and presence capable of indifference and detachment – through compassion for self and others. Other meditations, mindful activities, and repetitive movements like pruning plants, drumming or dancing may have similar impact and there is much to learn from the neuroscience field about this.

Imagine a business environment that is challenging but where you can show up authentically and feel loved and respected, and you approach others with similar curiosity and care.

What would be your needs to feel loved and respected? Here are some thoughts from my experience:

- **Social needs** – what type of cultural and structural realities are needed so you can forge the internal and external relationships for creative outcomes in uncertainty?

- **Learning needs** – what kind of information and leadership skills do you need?

- **Environmental needs** – what is critical to your physical wellbeing?

- **Financial needs** – what are your financial needs to accept more risk?

- **Personal needs** – who are you as an artist?

In my coaching, I've encountered clients drawing strength and insight from their authentic bread making, carpet weaving, storytelling, and band performance to tennis and soccer player selves. When clients affirm their artist selves they open the doors to self-motivation, can-do beliefs, readiness to explore even the "why not," curiosity about what might work, courage to let go of what doesn't serve momentarily, and openness to collaborating. Workplaces that build art into the physical work environment and encourage co-creating art reap the many benefits of connection and awareness. Individuals who care about their role and reputation as responsible leaders and build the space of arts into their inner world create their well of discretionary effort and boundaries for connection and awareness, and raise their chances for leadership effectiveness in the presence of uncertainty.

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Love for others and amazing business outcomes

One senior lawyer that I spoke to recently said that "in-house counsel benefit from managers who take care of their teams." People who love and respect themselves have greater potential to love and respect others. And when individuals interact with others and systems well, amazing quantum results become possible, and this is the business case for advocating for, investing in and enabling in-house counsel leadership and energy in the 21st Century Business Environment.



Paulo Samico, ACC Brazil President

Member Spotlight: Paulo Samico

Q: What led you to join ACC Mentor Match, and what did you hope to gain?

Paulo Samico: Real connection and the opportunity to meet people with different ideas and perspectives. And I can say I achieved my goal! Having the chance to analyze problems through a different lens and culture is truly enriching and makes us realize that it is impossible to have only one point of view.

Q: What is one insight from your conversations that changed how you think or act?

Samico: At the time, I was considering my next step after leaving a food company. I came to understand that patience is a virtue when it comes to professional experience, and that making good choices takes us to another level. What I mean is: it is important to choose your next professional challenge thoughtfully and deliberately.

Q: How has this mentoring relationship shaped how you approach your role or career decisions?

Samico: I realized that taking a pause to talk with other people is more important than one might think. In a world that pushes us to make decisions quickly — and not always wisely — learning this lesson is essential.

Q: What did you learn from your mentor that surprised you?

Samico: That in every country, position, and industry, there are difficult moments. For instance, my mentor's company was going through an extremely challenging period, and today it is recovering.

Q: What advice would you give to future mentees?

Samico: Listen carefully to your mentor's advice and try to understand what guides their decision-making — what they consider the fundamental principle when making a choice.

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?irin Köprücü is an ICF credentialed executive coach and partners with organizations to support their leadership effectiveness in today’s rapidly and globally evolving world. She works with leading in-house counsel who notice the growing potential of the legal role and want to advance their influence and participation in innovation and business impact. Her reputation as The Curiosity Coach, the go-to coach for emerging junior and senior leaders in a demanding business context grows with each client experience. Köprücü has over 20 years of leadership development experience, living and working in five different countries, with three different languages, and in corporate roles as a marketer and training director in Hoffmann La Roche and Novartis. She facilitates learning in the executive

education programs of Thunderbird School of Global Management and the LEAD Program of Stanford Graduate School of Business and has been leading her own business StrategicStraits, Inc. since 2006. With a passion for impact, she is the volunteer founder of the Global Friends Program at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and an active supporter of connection, creativity, and economic development through the arts around the world.