

The Teaching Role of In-house Lawyers

Career Development



Banner artwork by eamesBot / *Shutterstock.com*

Professors teaching law in business schools offer courses designed to prepare future business leaders for their legal responsibilities. In-house lawyers also play a teaching role when working with business leaders on specific legal matters and when developing training programs for employees that cover topics such as antitrust, compliance, contracts, crisis management, employment law, and records management. The approach to teaching used by legendary Wharton business law Professor Richard Shell might be instructive in performing these in-house teaching responsibilities. His career might also be of interest to corporate lawyers who are considering moving towards an academic career, as discussed at the conclusion of this article.

A chapter in my book *Seven Essentials for Business Success: Lessons from Legendary Professors* (Routledge, 2022) is devoted to Professor Shell. The book profiles award-winning MBA professors who teach the seven areas that are essential for business success: accounting, business law, finance, management, marketing, operations, and strategy. The book explains why law is important to the success of businesses ranging from startups to large enterprises, using Apple as an example of the latter.

Among his many accomplishments, Professor Shell has received over two dozen undergraduate and MBA teaching awards at Wharton and has authored several best-selling books. For many years, he chaired the Legal Studies and Business Ethics Department at Wharton. The e 21 tenure track

professors and 26 lecturers and adjunct professors in this department teach courses on the law relating to a wide range of business activities, including real estate, marketing, entrepreneurship, corporate finance, employment, international transactions, environmental management, blockchain and cryptocurrencies, securities regulation, the sports industry, and big data.

The chapter on Professor Shell describes his strategy in the classroom when teaching the Wharton required course on the legal responsibilities of business leaders. The chapter also includes a “Day in the Life” feature that illustrates the breadth of his professional activities. The following questions, adapted from the chapter, are relevant to the teaching role of in-house lawyers.

What philosophy guides your teaching?



Practicing moral values are imperative to your life. Na_Studio / *Shutterstock.com*

“Overall, my teaching philosophy closely tracks a Chinese Confucian aphorism: ‘Tell me and I’ll forget, show me and I might remember, involve me and I will learn.’ This idea appears to come from a Chinese scholar/teacher named Xun Kuang, who taught the importance of character and morality in everyday life. I have learned nearly everything of importance through practice, so I make the assumption that this is true for my students as well.

> I have learned nearly everything of importance through practice, so I make the assumption that this is true for my students as well.



Students can become more engaged in their studies through learning in smaller groups. mentalmind / *Shutterstock.com*

“I follow this rule of thumb: every moment students are engaged by participation is good. In a class of 70 students, only one person at a time can talk. So, I assign students to groups of six and regularly give them questions to discuss during class. Through this process, more people have a chance to talk, and it gives students who are more introverted a safer space.”

What advice do you have for teachers who are in an academic setting or who play a teaching role in a business?

“Three pieces of advice. First, prepare, prepare, prepare. Second, involve your audience through class participation. Third, students do not learn anything except on the foundation of what they already know. Your selection of examples, images, stories, and metaphors is crucial. Don’t use a sports example in a class where students are unfamiliar with that sport. Think about your audience’s common experience and then seek examples, stories, and images they can identify with. Check frequently to see if they are getting it. Read the group and, if they look distracted or preoccupied, give them a challenge, puzzle, or activity to refocus them.”

> Think about your audience's common experience and then seek examples, stories, and images they can identify with.

What are your key goals in teaching law to future business leaders?

Professor Shell describes his goals in terms of developing three skills important to the future success of business school students: the ability to (1) identify legal issues, (2) understand legal analysis, and (3) think strategically about the law. The first skill is especially important because business leaders must be able to identify legal issues that arise in day-to-day decision making to determine when to seek legal advice.



Understanding all legal aspects as a business owner plays an important role in your decision making skills. eamesBot / *Shutterstock.com*

The second skill, understanding legal analysis, is important because legal advice is an essential component of sound business decision making. While it is not necessary for business leaders to think like a lawyer, they benefit from understanding how lawyers think. The third skill is the ability to recognize the importance of law in developing and implementing business strategy. For example, the course includes discussion of how intellectual property law can be used to achieve competitive advantage.

> While it is not necessary for business leaders to think like a lawyer, they benefit from understanding how lawyers think.

In addition to considering Professor Shell's approach when teaching in-house, corporate lawyers have new opportunities to teach full-time, as business schools in recent years have expanded the number of teaching positions that do not carry research responsibilities. These full-time positions carry titles such as teaching professor, clinical professor, or instructor. For example, the Department of Business Law & Ethics at Indiana University's Kelley School of Business includes 28 professors, 11 of whom hold full-time teaching positions as clinical professors or instructors. The clinical professor positions require extensive experience in the practice of law — the type of experience that in-house lawyers can bring to the classroom. A starting point for those considering a teaching career is membership in the Academy of Legal Studies in Business, an association of business law professors that provides many resources for aspiring business law professors.

Disclaimer: The information in any resource in this website should not be construed as legal advice or as a legal opinion on specific facts, and should not be considered representing the views of its authors, its authors' employers, its sponsors, and/or ACC. These resources are not intended as a definitive statement on the subject addressed. Rather, they are intended to serve as a tool providing practical guidance and references for the busy in-house practitioner and other readers.

George Siedel



Professor of Business Administration and Business Law

University of Michigan

George Siedel completed graduate studies at the University of Michigan and Cambridge University. Following graduation, he worked as an attorney in a professional corporation before joining the faculty at the University of Michigan. Professor Siedel has been admitted to practice before the United States Supreme Court and in several states. He has served on several boards of directors and as Associate Dean at the University of Michigan’s Ross School of Business, where he headed the Executive Education Center.

Professor Siedel was a Visiting Professor at Stanford University and Harvard University, a Visiting Scholar at Berkeley, and a Parsons Fellow at the University of Sydney. He has been elected a Visiting Fellow at Cambridge University's Wolfson College and a Life Fellow of the Michigan State Bar Foundation. As a Fulbright Scholar in Eastern Europe, he held a Distinguished Chair in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

The author of numerous books and articles, Professor Siedel received the Faculty Recognition Award from the University of Michigan and several national research awards, including the Hoeber Award, the Ralph Bunche Award and the Maurer Award. In 2018, he received the Distinguished Career Achievement Award from the Academy of Legal Studies in Business.

Professor Siedel has received several teaching awards, including the 2018 Executive Program Professor of the Year Award from a consortium of thirty-six leading universities committed to international education.