

How to Gain Leadership Skills Inside and Outside Your Organization

Career Development



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Traditionally, in-house counsel have been hired to carry out the legal function for their organizations. However, more and more, in-house counsel are being tasked with leading, as the nature of their work benefits from in-house counsel taking on a leadership role. More often, in-house counsel want to grow beyond their legal skill set. They want to stretch themselves, develop their leadership abilities, and realize their full potential.

Leading can come in many forms.

Inside the organization

On the job

> Grappling with thorny or more visible legal matters may also present the opportunity to collaborate with and influence the organization's senior management, which in turn, can generate the opportunity to be at the proverbial 'table' with other leaders and learn from them.

Opportunities may exist to get this experience on the job, like being at a higher level in the hierarchy of the legal team, being the project lead on a major deal such as a merger or acquisition, or managing a high-profile regulatory issue, for example. Grappling with thorny or more visible legal matters may also present the opportunity to collaborate with and influence the organization’s senior management, which in turn, can generate the opportunity to be at the proverbial ‘table’ with other leaders and learn from them.



Make your presence known when handling important legal matters, this way you can become more knowledgeable when opportunities present themselves. ProStockStudio / *Shutterstock.com*

Employee groups

> Taking on this type of role can also help in-house counsel test what works and what needs improvement, providing the invaluable chance to be introspective and reframe one's leadership style.

Some in-house counsel may be seeking opportunities to further their leadership toolkit outside of the nuts and bolts of their legal role. There can be creative ways to advance these goals inside one’s organization. Certain organizations have employee resource groups or other professional development groups that have a chair or co-chair role. Leading one of these groups can be a rich opportunity to manage a budget, set strategic priorities, as well as influence and collaborate with their

team members to achieve results. Taking on this type of role can also help in-house counsel test what works and what needs improvement, providing the invaluable chance to be introspective and reframe one’s leadership style.



Taking on a leadership role allows in-house counsel to expand their personal knowledge and network with other colleagues. GoodStudio / *Shutterstock.com*

Outside the organization

Volunteering

There are also opportunities to volunteer as a mentor to other lawyers, students, or community members, which can help to exercise essential skills that leaders have such as active listening, empathy, professional development of others, and influence. Mentorship programs are often in place at law schools, law societies, and local bar associations. It should go without saying that opportunities may exist to mentor others in one’s organization as well.



Mentoring others helps to improve interpersonal skills and enhances leadership skills. Iconic Bestiary / *Shutterstock.com*

Participating on boards (i.e., nonprofit boards or legal association boards) can also help to provide the boardroom experience that some in-house counsel seek. This kind of experience could help in-house counsel bring their skills to bear in carrying out the board's mandate while at the same time learning key skills from others on the board.

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Education

Certain universities and other organizations have entire programs dedicated to developing the leadership acumen of in-house counsel. Some of these programs help to apply theory to practice without having to do so on the job. It may also be beneficial to explore courses or programs designed to cultivate cognitive diversity and emotional intelligence, essential qualities for effective leadership.

Whether it is on the job or outside of one's organization, with a little ingenuity, there are many opportunities for in-house counsel to sharpen their leadership skills and further their professional growth.

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