

2024 ACC Top 10 30-Somethings: Diane Gabl Kratz

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.



Science, law, or both? For Diane Gabl Kratz, growing up in a family full of scientists made it seem natural that she would follow the same route. An interest in law, however, caught her by surprise.

Now, she mixes both at Dolby Laboratories, where she is the director of intellectual property (IP) and operations.

“I initially intended to get a Ph.D. in physics. But after taking an undergrad course in law taught by a Cornell University Law School professor, I got really excited,” she recalls.

Representing herself in a small claims lawsuit during college sealed the deal. “I realized how difficult it is to navigate the system and how law is a valuable tool. I wanted to be equipped to protect not only myself, family, and friends, but anyone who is being treated unfairly,” Diane explains. (She won the case.)

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Incentivizing invention

Diane is a United States Patent and Trademark (USPTO)-registered patent attorney recognized for her expertise in incentivizing invention. As faculty for the Practicing Law Institute (PLI), she not only taught; she also published articles about inventor award programs in course handbooks, interviewing in-house counsel across industries and locations as part of her research. “Creativity, vision, and process improvements can spark innovation and motivate employees to document their inventions — even with limited budgets,” she observes.

In her prior in-house position at a Fortune 500 hardware company in Silicon Valley, Diane initiated a company-wide inventor recognition program. The multi-pronged program included input from an international cross-functional team of stakeholders from research and development, corporate communications, and public relations. As part of the initiative, Diane launched a website that included:

- An inventors Hall of Fame list;
- Statements from executives lauding the value of inventions; and
- Periodic profiles honoring highlighted inventors.

“Fair and transparent selection criteria” ensured inventor honorees reflected the global company's diverse workforce, Diane notes.

Just one quarter after implementation, invention disclosure submissions (IDS) increased by 100 percent.

Innovation at Diane’s previous employer had also been stifled by a complicated invention submissions platform. She streamlined the process and created a simplified IDS wizard featuring a user-friendly interface. She also developed and conducted interactive training sessions for engineers on the software, invention harvesting, the patenting process, and the “importance of innovation to company growth,” Diane recounts.

Managing risk and adding value

Patents are a key part of Dolby's licensing strategy. When Diane joined the company, she worked with her reports to clarify ownership for each task, ensuring that for essential tasks at least two employees were responsible and complete written documentation was developed. Promoting information sharing and collaboration was critical, and she achieved it by cross-training employees and rewarding them for teamwork.

"After careful consideration, I changed the reporting structure to one that naturally encouraged collaboration," she says.

A huge boost came from her manager, Tyrome Brown, VP, chief patent counsel, who helped Diane feel supported as she launched these initiatives. "My manager gave me a lot of autonomy and believed I would be effective," she relates.

Cultivating healthy culture

"Compassionate people management" is what Diane describes as her greatest asset while leading, coaching, and empowering her global team of about 20 professionals. "Now, the most rewarding part of my career is developing talent and making sure the environment is healthy," she declares.

Diversity, she realized, is more than the obvious — it's personality too, she points out. "Often, hiring managers prioritize a culture fit and look for someone who the team is most comfortable with. I look for a culture add — not just giving us what we already have. Show me someone who thinks differently — that person will push us forward."

Diane shares that she considers it her responsibility to cultivate a respectful environment where each person can thrive, both personally and professionally, while surpassing company goals.

Having experienced a challenging workplace environment in past jobs, she "became determined to protect others from bullying, sexual harassment, and discrimination." After she joined Dolby, her team's employee satisfaction rating improved. She adds, "The percentage who recommended the company as a great place to work skyrocketed!"

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