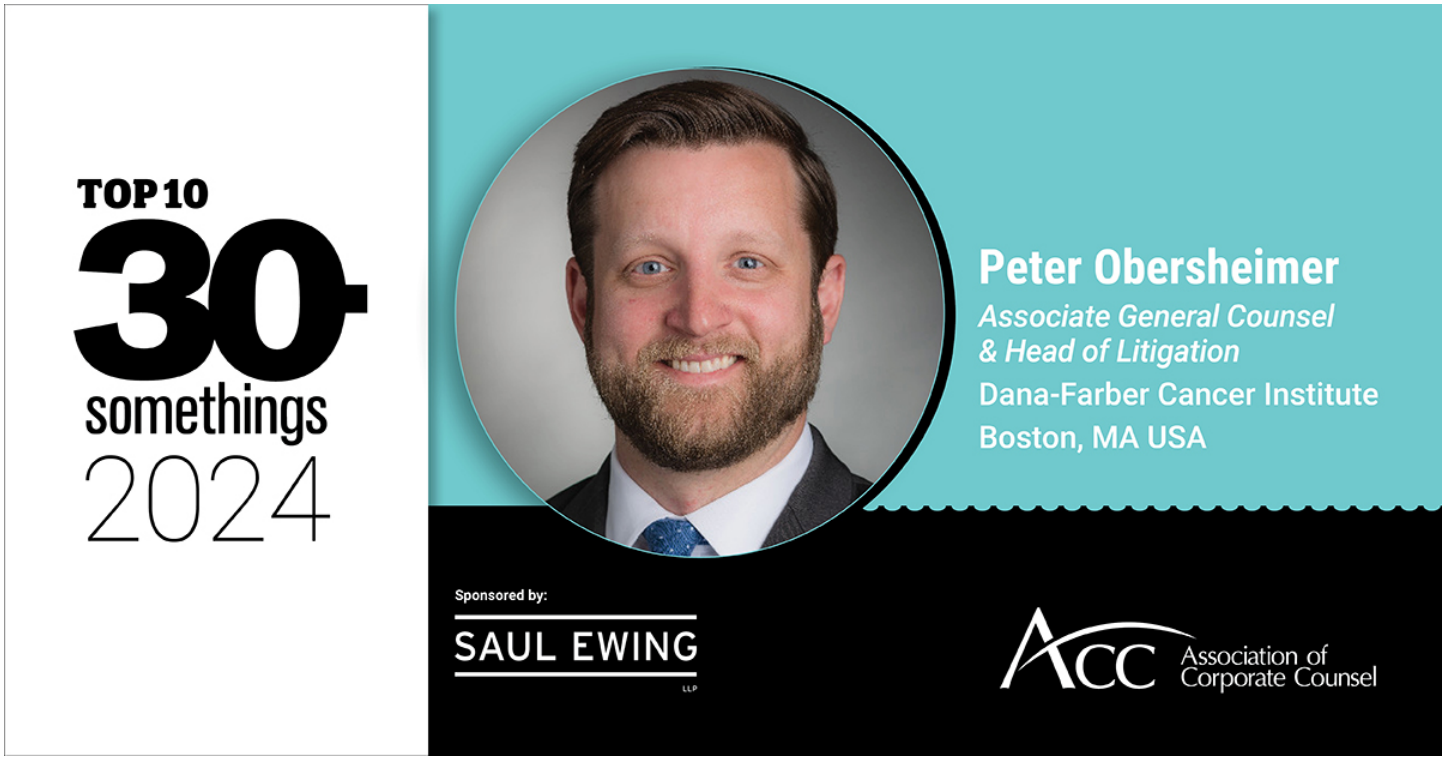


2024 ACC Top 10 30-Somethings: Peter Obersheimer

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.



Lawyer or psychologist? Some lawyers find psychology courses advantageous to practicing law. “I was drawn to the counseling skills used as a lawyer,” says Peter Obersheimer. But after taking a few

courses, he realized that a career in psychology was not the route for him. His style, however, reflects his understanding of what makes people tick, and his personal mantra is to use it to develop the best possible working relationships.

His easygoing way is one of the reasons, along with a myriad of other accomplishments, that he's being honored in his role as associate general counsel and Head of Litigation at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute.

Relationships are key

"Calm" and "perceptive" are common descriptions of Peter.

"I've always enjoyed being a source of stability when others are in difficult times — that's sort of my North Star in what drew me to a be a lawyer and what I love about being a lawyer," he reflects.

Jennifer Wilcox, senior vice president and general counsel at Dana-Farber Institute, and Peter's manager, says he is "able to build relationships even when opinions about the best approach may differ and, through those relationships and his steady track record, persuade people."

Working for a company with a cause helps. "We are mission-focused — we are here for an important reason," Peter emphasizes. And while medical providers and business leaders at the company are his clients, the patients are the mission.

For a lawyer just starting out, he believes there is one critical skill that is developed in practice and not in the law school classroom setting. "Listening is very important, as well as building trust and goodwill by offering practical solutions," he says.

Still, no matter how much one listens, a room with many experts is likely to be a room with many different views. "I don't find I am often in opposition against my clients. The topics are often complex so I try to find a framework for the group to identify key team values that might allow us to talk about trade-offs, whether managing risks or evaluating business needs," Peter explains.

Such style goes a long way in creating a collegial feel but, when it comes to the law, the bottom-line results are critical. With that in mind, Peter is known as what Jennifer calls "the sometimes unsung value of internal counsel as 'dot connectors in chief,'" in the ways he connects the varying parts of Dana-Farber to tackle and solve difficult conundrums.

One such situation was his initiative to enhance the processes around tracking technologies on the company's websites, an issue many organizations have faced. Besides overseeing a practical litigation settlement, Peter proactively called for a website hygiene audit and worked with company leaders to update policies. His work included the successful translation of technological jargon into appropriate policy language and the provision of advice for ongoing website operational needs.

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Don't adopt every cool new technology

While hailed for modernizing technological processes, Jennifer explains that “he doesn’t jump on the bandwagon of every bright, shiny, new thing, and for that reason his counsel on innovative approaches is widely heeded.”

Peter revamped several systems, which resulted in:

- Enhanced oversight of outside counsel- supporting medical malpractice cases and support for physician defendants in those cases;
- Refined investigation techniques with training for employees involved in internal investigations;
- Improved document retention policies and practices; and
- Support for the implementation of a new matter management system, allowing Dana-Farber to move from a paper invoicing process to a streamlined e-billing system.

Ruffling feathers doesn’t seem to be part of Peter’s experience. “Especially around complex subject matter and as an in-house lawyer, you have to have a good understanding of the business and the business teams you are working with. By gaining that understanding, even if there are competing interests or tensions, you can agree on common values to drive a common strategy,” he says.

When surprises happen, Peter sees his role as providing stability in rough waters.

Take the reaction to a subpoena, for example, which many clients greet with anxiety. “What may seem more routine to me, may be unnerving to the client,” Peter says. “Clients can be eased by illuminating the process.”

A holistic member of the community

Peter doesn’t always get a rest after his workday. For example, Peter was chosen to participate in the Boston Bar Association’s Public Interest Leadership Program and has been a member of the Boston Bar Association’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion section. He has worked pro bono for the Disability Law Center and served on the Emerging Leaders Board for St. Francis House, a Boston homeless shelter and advocacy organization. He is also a volunteer in the Massachusetts Best Buddies program.

And he even gives through his love of sports. He played on the Dana-Farber hockey team in a charity match against Boston Bruins alumni, ran in the Boston Marathon to support the company, and captained teams for various running and cycling races that support local charities.

“My outside activities help keep me energized,” he shares. “These experiences improve my perspective and practice as a holistically well-rounded member of the community.”

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