

2024 ACC Top 10 30-Somethings: Stephen Mar

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.



Stephen Mar has a reputation for finding innovative and holistic solutions to complex legal and business challenges — a skill he credits in large part to deliberately structuring his career to be as

broad as possible.

Now chief legal officer and chief administrative officer at Odeko, a supply chain and restaurant technology startup, Stephen's prior position as global head of litigation and investigations at WeWork laid the foundation for his current success.

High-stakes challenges in crises

Stephen's career is highlighted by his strategic navigation of critical situations. Take, for example, WeWork's 2019 withdrawal of its US initial public offering (IPO) and the company's subsequent multi-year turnaround. One of Stephen's tasks was to develop a strategy to minimize the risk of exiting hundreds of leases worldwide. The strategy needed to be broad enough to be applied globally, but also detailed enough to account for different country, state, and local requirements — and needed to be executed as the global real estate market plunged because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

His team, working alongside their real estate colleagues, managed to achieve renegotiations and exits of more than 250 leases and, perhaps more incredibly, did so while managing a hefty docket of high-profile litigations and investigations.

WeWork was able to complete its turnaround and launch publicly in just two years, and the successful implementation of this strategy was one of the primary reasons why.

Stephen's journey reveals how proactive leadership and resilience are instrumental to in-house success.

Join Stephen Mar on July 23 for a webcast where he'll share insights and anecdotes from his in-house career!

Strategic adaptability amid challenges

Stephen has been recognized as an expert in alternative fee arrangements (AFAs) from the in-house perspective and finding creative ways to employ them in a variety of circumstances. He speaks publicly about AFAs and shares other expertise from the perspective of an in-house leader, including in articles in the *ACC Docket*.

At WeWork, Stephen made it a priority to institute an offensive litigation program and negotiated three different AFAs with three different law firms to that end. Each was customized depending on the type of matter, the firm's risk-reward profile, and other factors. The program was wildly successful, bringing in over US$150 million in less than two years and transforming the legal function into a profit center.

Stephen continues to champion AFAs at Odeko, applying creative fee structures to maximize value for the company.

Joining Odeko as its first GC, Stephen quickly contributed. Amid fluctuating macroeconomic conditions, he played a pivotal role in the company's Series D fundraising, which successfully secured US$53 million.

His comprehensive understanding of legal and business dynamics facilitated his rapid promotion to chief legal and administrative officer, where he now oversees multiple corporate functions, including human resources, communications, insurance/risk, and payroll.

“I enjoy learning how to do new things, and this expanded role gives me the opportunity to fulfill this desire,” Stephen reflects.

Leadership lessons in pro bono work

Beyond his professional achievements, Stephen is deeply engaged in pro bono work and community service. His efforts have included representing a capital client through their post-conviction appeals. He reflects that this experience, along with other pro bono work representing criminal defendants, opened his eyes to the flaws and biases present in legal processes. Stephen has also worked with his alma mater, NYU Law, in assisting with asylum applications.

He also serves on the NYU Law Alumni Association’s board of directors and co-chairs the recent graduate committee, where one of his goals is creating programming to help early- and mid-career attorneys navigate career options.

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>
> Stephen Mar

Outside of the law, Stephen donates significant time and resources to underserved populations in the San Francisco Bay Area, including unhoused individuals and foster families.

Stephen credits much of his success to the mentors who helped and advised him early in his career, as well as his former chief legal officer at WeWork, who prepared him for his current job by giving him opportunities to tackle projects outside his traditional areas of expertise. In turn, he has become a mentor himself, particularly focusing on supporting women, AAPI and other diverse lawyers.

One piece of advice Stephen often offers his mentees — and a lesson that it took him years to learn — is to be proactive in directing their careers. “Ultimately, you are the architect of your own career. Don’t be afraid to raise your hand and ask for what you want — more often than not, you will find that people are willing to help you achieve your goals,” Stephen shares.

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