

Top 10 Habits of Successful Corporate Counsel: #6 Creating a Brand Around Your Legal Advice

Career Development



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Every in-house lawyer creates a brand around their legal advice whether they realize it or not. Some lawyers are known as aggressive while others are seen as cautious. Some lawyers are known for asking thoughtful questions and others are better known for the clarity in their answers. Some lawyers are seen as deep subject matter experts in a highly complex area and others are like Swiss Army knives in their ability to help the company in nearly any situation.

There are countless brands that a lawyer can create around their legal advice. The important

questions for you are what brand surrounds your legal advice and have you been intentional in your own branding in how you interact within the company? As you answer those questions, here is my #6 habit of successful corporate lawyers:

#6. You create brand around your legal advice that encourages the business to reach out to you on the most difficult issues.

You should think of your legal advice as a consumer product. Is it helpful? Is it of good value? How does it make the consumer feel? Are you in more demand than others? Does it stand out from other products? How good is your marketing?

Now, it takes years and many experiences to build a brand — not to mention trust in that brand. But every interaction within your company contributes to your brand. The top corporate lawyers with the best brands consistently exhibit these characteristics around their advice:

1. Responsiveness

It starts with responsiveness. If you are not responsive, there is immediate customer dissatisfaction. It is the single greatest complaint of lawyers. Consider responsiveness as the bare minimum to have a positive brand around your legal work. We all need to find work-life balance, but sometimes you have got to drop everything to go far in your career.

2. Unselfish

I view problem-solving broadly when I think of the best branded lawyers. They run towards the burning building, not away from it or parallel to it. They want and expect teamwork to solve these problems. They do not care who comes up with the idea or who gets credit as long it helps the company out of the problem. They put aside all personal ambition and recognition for the company goal of completion and satisfaction.

3. Passion

They care so deeply about fixing the problem that it acts like an engine driving the advice and judgment pushing them to be simultaneously creative and relentless. Business executives want to

see that you care about the problem just as much as they do.

If you can exhibit these qualities as your brand, you will succeed. Your brand will act as the “magnet” you want to create, drawing in business executives who will seek your advice during difficult challenges.

Nevertheless, you need to find your own brand qualities around your advice. It must be genuine. It must be authentic. It must be YOU. Whatever your best qualities, you should be sure to pull them through to create your brand. You should write your mini-marketing plan in your head completing this sentence: “*I want people to know me as the lawyer who ...”* Without that mission statement, you run the risk of being seen inconsistently, which is never a good thing with brand marketing.

To bring home why I think this is so important, you should consider the example of the warm chocolate chip cookie given out when you check-in at DoubleTree hotels. They give out a cookie to reinforce their brand of being a warm and welcoming hotel. This simple gesture creates a buzz around DoubleTree that could never be created with a TV advertisement or even a viral social media moment. DoubleTree gives out 75,000 cookies per day. About 34 percent of people tell a story about the cookie. That is 25,000 positive stories (because who does not love warm chocolate chip cookies) about DoubleTree because of a cookie. That is the power of a brand. You want to create the same buzz around your advice so that it travels by word of mouth such that it is actively sought.

I asked three lawyers who I think have the best brands around their work to describe their brand for me. If they had to pick a product brand to describe their legal advice, what product or company would they pick and why? Here is what they said:


Donald LeGower, Vice President - Litigation and Government Investigations, Bristol-Myers Squibb



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Donald LeGower (BMS): “I like to analogize my role to a set of all-weather, **Goodyear** tires. Tires help a car go fast when that is needed or slow down when required. Most of the time, they are there, keeping the car moving, on the road, and between the lines. When the weather gets harsh or the road gets rough, and it is harder to navigate through hazards, the quality of the tires really shows, and they become the difference between being able to continue the journey or having to pull to the

side of the road. In the same way, day to day, I provide advice that helps the company move with urgency to deliver medicines to patients. When the company faces legal challenges, I help to find the best ways to overcome those challenges so it can continue moving forward and continue to deliver for patients."


Anne Showalter, Senior Vice President Legal Operations Manufacturing Supply Chain and Legal Contracting Network, GSK

amazon

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Anne Showalter (GSK): "**Amazon**. Why? Amazon is known for its agility and knowledge of its consumers. To be an effective supply chain lawyer, I need to understand the complex and ever-shifting manufacturing and supply chain business and demonstrate agility to adapt my legal advice to the evolving internal and external environment, including anticipating and understanding regulatory changes, new technologies and biopolitical impact."


Matthew Stennes, Vice President, Chief Litigation and Investigations Counsel, Medtronic



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Matthew Stennes (Medtronic): “I would compare my role leading Medtronic’s global litigation function to that of a well-functioning, high-tech home security system, like **ADT**. During the routine, day-to-day litigation that occurs every day in a highly regulated industry like MedTech, our clients don’t need to worry about things — we’ve got matters covered and under control. We don’t get overly alarmed or surprised by most things; however, we know when a problem is, on occasion, a really big deal. And when we have to sound an alarm, escalate the issue to the right: “ authorities,” and mount an extraordinary response, we do it in a professional and serious — but calm and confident manner ... Hopefully in a way that deters our opponents from trying again in the future.”

I love these answers because they reflect how the best lawyers have been intentional about how they make the company and executives feel about them and their legal advice. Invoking Jerry Seinfeld, as it relates to the DoubleTree cookie branding story, “If people would only look to the cookie, all our problems would be solved.” You should leave people feeling the same about your legal advice as the cookie and you will go far in corporate life.

Join ACC

Brennan Torregrossa



Senior Vice President, Litigation, Investigations, Digital, and Privacy

GSK

Brennan Torregrossa is senior vice president at GSK, a global biopharma company with a purpose to unite

science, technology, and talent to get ahead of disease together. Before GSK, Torregrossa was a partner at Dechert LLP in the product liability and government investigation departments. Torregrossa has over 25 years of experience advising Fortune 500 pharmaceutical companies on complex legal, risk, and compliance challenges. At GSK, he leads a team of litigation, investigation, digital, privacy, and cyber attorneys and professionals at GSK.