

Top 10 Habits of Successful Corporate Counsel: #2 Be Uber Effective by Knowing the Business and Going to the Scene of the Accident

Career Development



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Uber had a problem. The startup company providing rides and food delivery was having trouble attracting and keeping its drivers. The drivers were unsatisfied with the Uber experience, in particular finding the sign-up process frustrating, low satisfaction on the share of fees between driver and Uber, and a company more focused on the rider experience than the driver experience. Without drivers, there is no Uber.

Uber's CEO, Dara Khosrowshahi, needed to tackle the problem — and quickly. He did so in a simple, but highly effective way called "Project Boomerang." He got in his car and worked as an Uber driver. He transported customers. He delivered food. He earned a living from Uber just like a driver would.

It was only through that experience that he truly learned why recruiting and keeping drivers was a persistent problem. As a driver, as opposed to a CEO, he instituted many fixes including:

- Simplifying a single sign up for rides and deliveries.
- Providing visibility on destination and projected payment before trips were accepted.
- Weeding out tip-baiting.

Since his driver experience, Uber's fortunes have significantly improved and the CEO points to this project as one of the main catalysts for a turnaround. This great example of a willingness to fundamentally understand the business and experience its greatest problem brings me to #2 in my series of top habits of successful in-house counsel.

2. You make knowing the business a priority to make your legal advice far more effective.

We all like to think we know the business, but there are layers to knowing the business. It is difficult to set aside the time to learn the business and get deeper and deeper into those layers of understanding. You should push yourself to learn it better than you do today. Make it one of your key objectives each year.

How might you do that when you have enough on your plate staying current with laws and regulations in your practice area?

I suggest that you employ the "go to the scene of the accident" approach. If you are a lawyer bringing or defending a claim based on a car accident, you have to go to the scene of the accident to best represent your client. Without going, how would you know the perspective of the drivers? What questions, defenses, and claims are missed that would have been sparked by going to the scene? All of your legal advice is missing a vital perspective and instead dominated by what others tell you about that scene.

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Too few lawyers go to the "scene of the accident." You can stand out by doing so. Here are some examples:

- If you are providing legal advice about a manufacturing site, tour the manufacturing site.
- If you are providing legal counsel about one of your products, ask for a sample product and use it (if possible) or have it on your desk to examine and play around with.
- If you are providing legal advice around a technology, experience it as a customer would.

You should get hands-on experience with whatever is critical to your advice. You should not view this as "lost time" when you could be researching the law, conducting legal analysis, or answering emails. You should view it as critical to your advice and thus a priority.

There are, of course, some limitations to this approach — expense, feasibility, and location. But you

would be surprised how many of these obstacles you can overcome by simply asking the business to touch, feel, or see the part of the business that you are advising. The business wants you to know the business more than anyone. They will make it happen and be more likely to accept and trust your advice when you make these asks.

To be uber effective, you should make knowing the business your business.

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