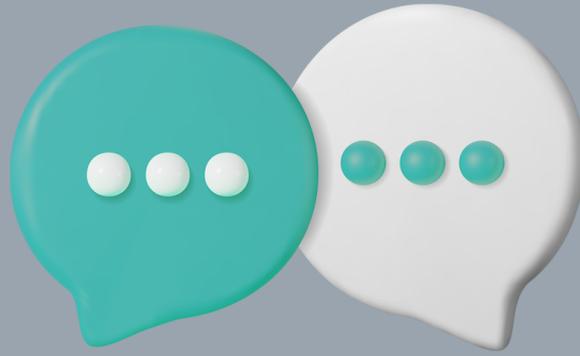




ACC InConversation: Henrietta Rowe of Ramsay Health Care

Interviews and Profiles



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For Henrietta Rowe, group general counsel and company secretary at Ramsay Health Care, managing through change and adapting to global crises shaped her career — and gave her a wealth of knowledge and perspective relevant for today's in-house counsel.

In dialogue with ACC President and CEO Veta T. Richardson, Rowe shared about key moments of her in-house career and offered advice for others looking to grow in their careers as part of the ACC InConversation series.

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Rowe's career journey

"I started at Sydney University," Rowe recalled, "but really, I've always been interested in politics and the law — primarily because that's what governs the way that we live our lives."

For Rowe, she saw the law not just as a set of rules, but as a powerful instrument of influence. "I think if you're able to put yourself in a position where you influence that, you can make a real impact," she said.

That perspective has defined her path from corporate law at Herbert Smith Freehills to a secondment to the Commonwealth Bank of Australia. This placed her at the center of a period of heightened regulatory focus and change in Australia, in an industry that was the subject of significant media scrutiny — in the context of the fallout of the global financial crisis, a sweeping prudential inquiry, and the [Banking Royal Commission](#). That experience provided a front-row view into the pivotal role legal teams play in managing change, scrutiny and safeguarding reputation.

"Often, being in the right place at the right time makes all the difference," she said. "The kind of exposure I had during that time — what might have taken years to gain elsewhere — happened in just months."

That immersion prepared Rowe for the next step in her career to her current position as Group General Counsel and Company Secretary at Ramsay Health Care, a global healthcare provider operating in eight countries with more than 90,000 employees.

In 2019, a call from Ramsay's Group Chief People Officer opened the door to an executive opportunity. "You reach a point where you know you're ready," she reflected. "This was a chance to build a team, shape a function, and embed legal and governance across a global organization in a meaningful way."

Managing changes

Rowe reflected and described one of the challenges she faced in her current role: changing industries from financial services to healthcare, and then being faced with the COVID-19 pandemic just six months into her new position.

When asked about how easy or difficult it was for Rowe to transition roles and her biggest learnings, she replied: “Whenever you are coming into a new organization, particularly if you’re from an outside industry, my advice would just be to really observe.” She also stressed the importance of observing the culture of your organization: “But just really observe before you make any changes because there is a steep learning curve.”

Lessons learned from crises

Rowe’s experience spans two major global crises — the 2008 financial crash and the COVID-19 pandemic. From this, she distilled two core lessons for legal leaders:

- **Be deeply familiar with your company’s crisis response framework**, and ensure the right stakeholders are at the table.
- **Over-communicate** — whether it’s with your team or your board of directors, transparent and frequent updates foster cohesion and agility.

Career advice for in-house counsel

“This is a marathon, not a sprint.” That was the best piece of career advice that was given to Rowe. She urged others to slow down and do things in a sustainable way. “You get better and become more equipped with the skills that you need to deal with life as a general counsel,” Rowe said. Work in a way that is sustainable.

Her advice for introverts or in-house counsel that are shy but may be looking for opportunities is to “be proactive and take ownership of your career.” She closed with a practical, pointed piece of advice for all in-house counsel: “Pick up the phone when it rings.”

The speed of business demands responsiveness. While it’s tempting to screen calls and respond after gathering your thoughts, doing so can create distance between legal and the rest of the organization. Authenticity and accessibility go further. “You don’t need to know all the answers right away. You need to show up,” she added.

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Rowe’s leadership style

Rowe views leadership as a privilege — one that demands ongoing self-awareness and continuous learning and education.

Through formal programs like INSEAD’s Management Acceleration Program and executive coaching at Ramsay, she has developed a leadership philosophy that places people first. “You need to be self-aware. Who are the extroverts on your team? Who are the introverts? How do you get the best out of each person?”

She also highlighted the importance of emotional literacy and team support, reminding leaders to adapt to life’s messiness — parental leave, caregiving, or personal loss — with empathy and flexibility.

“Developing your network, as well as putting in place the mentorship programs, doing the performance reviews, taking the time to do the one-on-one. We absolutely have to do it and it is one of the best aspects of my role,” Rowe said.

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Climbing the ladder

When asked how she developed executive presence before formally stepping into leadership, Rowe pointed to project-based learning. Her involvement in the Banking Executive Accountability Regime (BEAR) at CBA gave her critical visibility across departments and access to senior leadership and the board, in this way she was able to more deeply understand the organization.

“You don’t need a title to show leadership. Look for projects that give you access to broader stakeholders and insight into how the business runs,” Rowe said.

Her parting wisdom for all in-house counsel is to be proactive and take ownership of your career, such as getting involved in [ACC’s Mentor Match program](#).

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