

My Take: New Year, New Opportunities for Hope

Career Development



A new year signals a clean slate — a chance to begin again, to embark on something new, and maybe even an opportunity to say goodbye to some not-so-pleasant memories of the previous year. I think we all can agree that 2020 was a challenging year that tested our resolve in ways never before experienced. We faced and continue to face a global pandemic, social unrest, financial crises, and, as I mentioned in a previous article, a general lack of civility in our workplaces, our neighborhoods, our communities, and home lives.

That said, the challenges 2020 presented made way for some truly impactful and maybe even needed changes. On a larger scale, COVID-19 forced many of us to work from home and to take fewer trips via cars, trains, and airplanes. This has resulted in improved air quality as well as less pollution, which has allowed our wildlife to flourish. I think it's also allowed us to flourish in many ways — we all needed the break.

One thing that became crystal clear to me this year as a leader was that our organization's strongest assets are our people. As leaders, we had to make tough decisions this year: deciding whether and when to close our physical offices, stores, or restaurants; in many cases, how to do more with less; and if cuts to staff or services would be necessary. Through all this disruption and change, we asked our staff to show up and if your staff is like mine at ACC, they have risen to the occasion.

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Employee safety was and continues to be my top concern, as is the ability for staff to mentally “show up.” We implemented work-from-home back in March like many organizations. And then introduced a condensed workweek option soon after. Many people were working longer hours anyway and offering the option to do so regularly with one day off during the week was attractive to more than 60 percent of my team. Further, we encourage staff to participate in wellness activities, including “Wellness Wednesdays” where during our daily 15-minute “morning coffee chats” the team shares tips for how to deal with stress, for example, and even have had professionals offer chair yoga sessions via Zoom. These are just a few things ACC has done to keep staff connected and, hopefully, feel seen and heard. Perhaps your organization has encouraged similar activities? I’d love to hear from you and share your suggestions with our community!

Doing right by our employees is important, as is doing right by our communities. People want to do business with and work for employers that make doing good part of their organizational values. Corporate Social Responsibly (CSR) and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) programs and policies are an essential part of doing business today. Doing good is no longer a “nice to have” piece of your organizational culture, and when authentic and executed well, it is actually good for business.

I believe this wholeheartedly; and am honored to serve as a member of Ethisphere’s Equity and Social Justice Initiative Advisory Council as well as their Strategic Advisory Council. If you don’t know about the great work this organization does to advance the ethical practices and standards of the business community, I suggest you begin by taking a look at the “World’s Most Ethical Companies” initiative. Ethisphere’s annual recognition celebrates a select group of companies that have demonstrated exceptional programs and practices. While the list of 2021 winners will be announced early in the year, you can look back at previous years’ winners and perhaps you will be inspired to seek to be named to the list in the future. I will remember 2020 as a year that dealt us its best, and its worse. But look at the result — we showed up, we stepped up, we offered empathy to one another, and I’d like to think we’ve emerged on the other side better enabled to tackle whatever may be headed our way next. We’ve been forever changed by the events of the last year, and it is my hope that we take the lessons learned into 2021. I know many of us are rebuilding and replenishing our thinly stretched reserves, but let’s agree not to simply go back to life as it was. Let’s work hard and lead our organizations to success, but continue to remember to pause and to put people first.

Veta T. Richardson



Former President & CEO

Association of Corporate Counsel

Veta T. Richardson is the immediate past president and chief executive officer of the Association of Corporate Counsel (ACC). Headquartered in Washington, DC, ACC is the world's largest legal association dedicated exclusively to serving the interests of in-house counsel. With an international membership of more than 45,000 in-house lawyers at more than 10,000 organizations in 85 countries, ACC serves as the "voice of the in-house bar" for corporate lawyers at 98 percent of the Fortune 100 and 51 percent of the Global 1000.

With more than 60 chapter operations around the world, Richardson's top priorities as CEO involve continuing to increase ACC's global footprint and charting the organization through a strategic plan and vision designed to strengthen its position as the global voice for in-house counsel. Members look to ACC to advocate in support of their rights and interests as in-house counsel, as well as to offer the practice resources, education, global legal and regulatory analysis, and networking opportunities needed to advance their professional development.