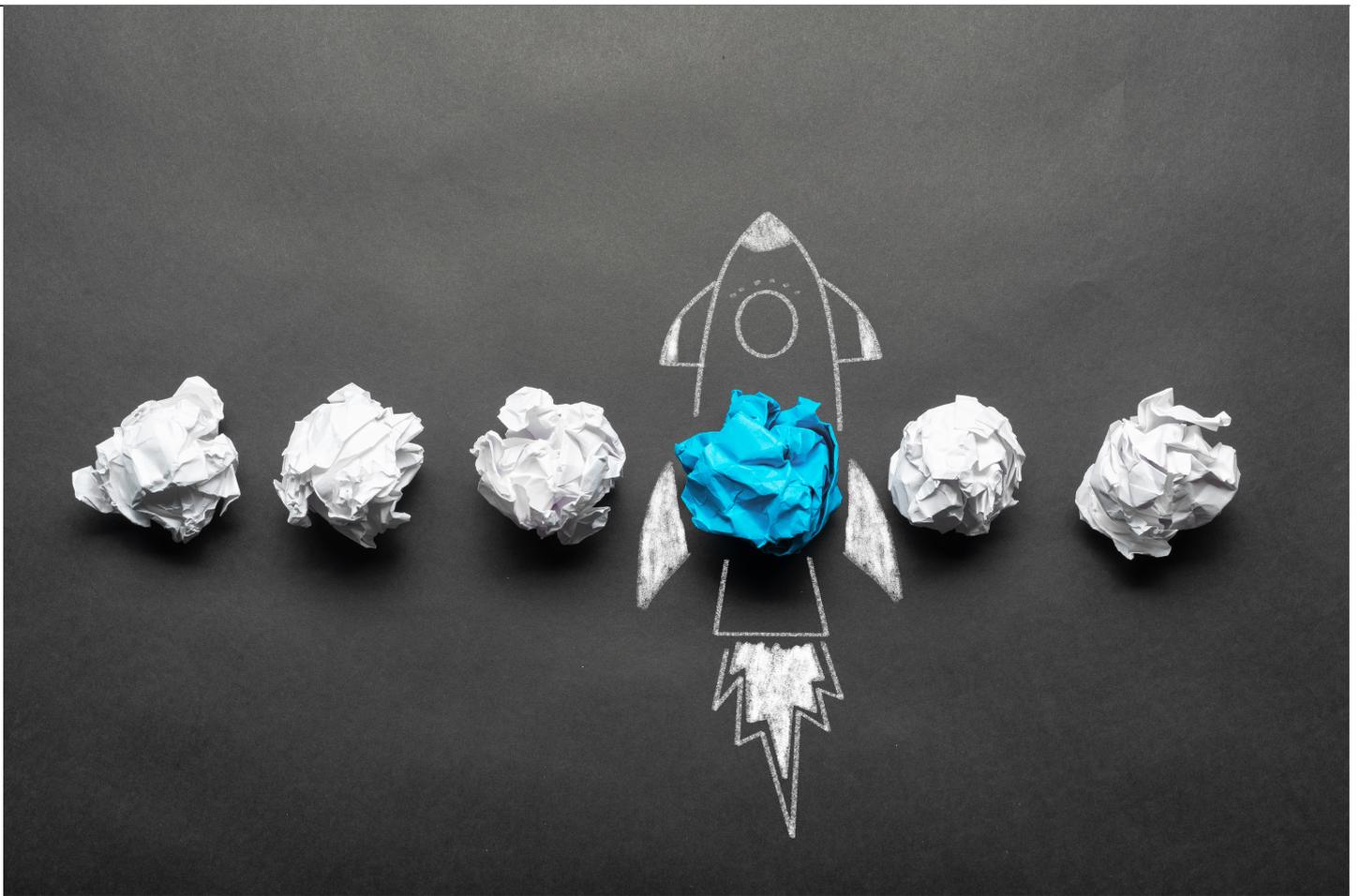




5 Lessons from Working In-house at a Startup

Law Department Management

Career Development



In 2019, I joined one of Berlin's start-ups as associate general counsel at TIER Mobility GmbH. The company's mission is to change mobility for good by offering a shared e-mobility solution. During the company's first year, it had 80 employees. The following year, we scaled to over 1,000 employees and expanded to 13 countries. The pace of this rapidly expanding organization, and the energy of the employees working behind the scenes, is outstanding.

Here are the key lessons I've learned as in-house counsel at a scale-up that you can use to imbue the corporate world with the start-up spark.

1. Get motivated by the start-up vibe

Working in a scale-up sometimes feels like being in a cult. The people are tremendously motivated and believe in the founder's vision. They want to drive the company to success and learn from each other. It is an experience in itself to work in such an environment and drive a mission with like-minded people. The vibe is young, fresh, and full of energy. You will be able to explore your creative and business-oriented side and build a network of highly qualified people. If you are interested, you can learn and benefit from other departments in a way that you could not experience as quickly in a bigger corporation. The start-up field is filled with connected, extremely interested people that think outside the box.

Key takeaway: Connect to more people outside the legal environment and get inspired by different

motivations.

2. Be ready for the advanced “swimming course”

Taking various “swimming lessons” before joining a scale-up is good preparation. All the learnings from previous jobs will form a basic skill set for the challenges that the advanced swimming course will offer: You learn a theoretic and methodic approach from working in a law office. From working as a judge, you learn to explain law in an easy way and learn to assess and understand different people quickly. Working in-house in a corporate role teaches you to become a specialist in a specific area of law. When joining a scale-up, you will be the go-to person for a variety of matters. All business units need your advice ASAP. You will advise in all fields of law (just to name a few: corporate, commercial, compliance, employment law, data protection, product liability, litigation ...); hence the learning curve is immense. A methodic approach is important since you will not have advised in detail in all these fields in the past. Having a good network of external counsel is key. You will absorb knowledge like a sponge: The most important part is to combine the external expertise with a practical approach. When scaling quickly, it is not an option to wait for approval by legal. Legal needs to act at the pace of the business. You learn how to act quickly, commercially, and practically to be the *enabler* the business needs and not the *blocker*.

Key takeaway: Inhale all learnings that you make along your way.

3. Become client-centric

Lawyers tend to hide behind language. In the start-up environment, you will soon realize how important it is to know and understand your client. Working as in-house counsel in a scale-up allows you to work with all hierarchical levels of the organization in all fields of the business. This offers you the unique opportunity to truly understand the business needs and work with many different-minded people.

Client-centricity is key, especially in environments where your client may not know the right questions to ask or when to ask. The majority of employees working in a scale-up are still in the first years of their career: They do not yet have the experience dealing with legal topics, hence, you will quickly learn how to get everyone involved and onboard.

Being client-centric in the scale-up world includes being proactive. Proactive lawyers get a voice in the business. You learn the importance of becoming visible within your organization, because if you are not, legal will simply not be involved. You can easily become more visible, by using the communication tools of the business. Don't be afraid of using slack channels to interact with other departments. Get to know your business, be available for minor questions, and show that lawyers are humans — lower the barrier of talking to legal people.

Key takeaway: Knowing your client is key to a successful legal department. Don't underestimate the existing barrier between lawyers and non-lawyers. By being proactive and offering client-centric advice, you can help open the channels of communication.

4. Become a pro at prioritization

A day has a limit and there are always things that need to be done. What is business critical and needs to be done asap, and where do people misinterpret whether a query is as high a priority as

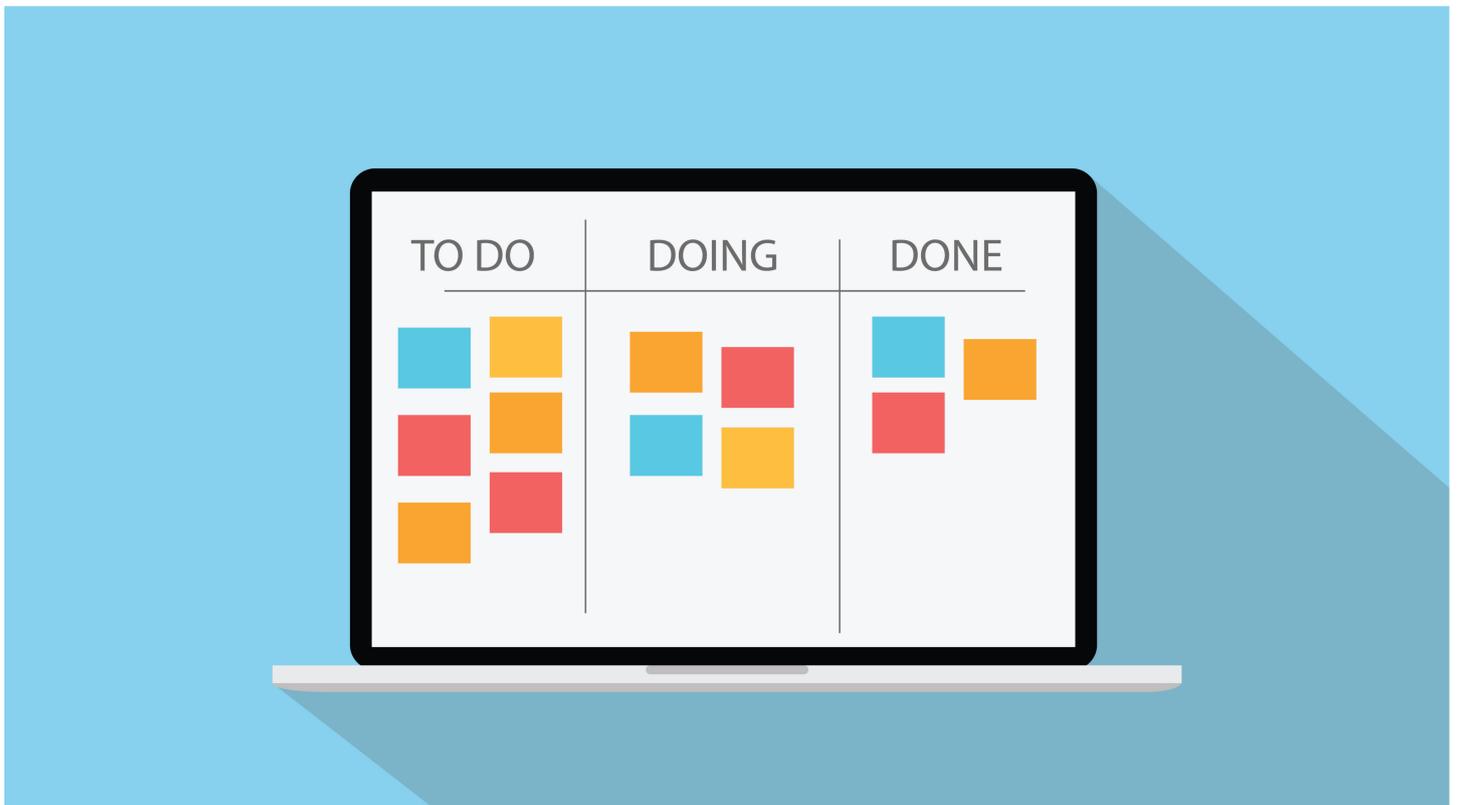
they think it is? You will immediately learn to prioritize matters to work in the most efficient way possible. In addition, you will learn to organize and structure yourself.

Since legal sometimes feels like a blackbox to other departments, it helps to be transparent about your prioritization. A great way of achieving this is to share your initiatives for the upcoming six weeks on a rotating basis. Another option is to create a transparent Kanban-task board for specific topics, e.g., “Contract Reviews” and “Drafts,” visible to the whole company.

Key takeaway: Discover whether a more transparent approach could help your business understand the priorities of your daily work.

5. Understand the value of legal operations

To understand the *true* value of legal operations, you must have felt the pain of thinking about changes. You can accelerate this inner mindset change by working in a start-up environment. In a chaotic world of huge amounts of incoming requests with highest priority, minor process changes can have a huge impact on the efficiency of your legal department.



A Kanban board can keep track of tasks and workload.

Start-ups are using quite cool tools. Think about accelerating the way your legal department works by implementing a ticketing system. You could use the dashboards of the ticketing system as a [Kanban board](#) to keep track of tasks and workload within your department. You could introduce a self-service dashboard within your business organizations knowledge space, offering FAQs, templates, and checklists. Last, but not least, you can truly get to know the technical possibilities of tools by entering into a dialogue with your tech team. There are many hidden features that can help your legal departments efficiency.

Key takeaway: Get to know the tools used within your business. They offer great chances to become

more efficient — not only in the start-up field.

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