

Straight to In-house: P&G’s Tara Rosnell on Rising to the Ranks of Hiring Attorney

Career Development





“Straight to In-house” is a new series intended to explore the trend of law school graduates beginning their careers in corporate legal departments. The next Q&A in the series delves into Tara Rosnell’s career at P&G, where she began her legal career after law school, and has since risen to

the ranks of hiring manager.

The path to in-house practice is a unique one. Traditionally, lawyers may make this move after a stint (or two) at a firm or perhaps following a clerkship for a judge, or work with a government agency. Some move in-house after working with a client so closely that the thought of working for them becomes more attractive. And others decide to leave law school graduation and go directly to an in-house law department. There are of course a few steps in between, which can include anything from summer programs within in-house legal departments, to law school coursework that includes mirroring an in-house counsel, and more.

No matter the path to in-house practice, the fact is that while many graduates still end up in firms initially — according to 2016 statistics compiled by the Section of Legal Education and Admissions of the American Bar Association (ABA), 45.5 percent of graduates obtained positions with law firms while 13.5 percent obtained positions in business and industry — the legal profession is changing, especially as it relates to the traditional firm model. This means that law students are considering in-house careers earlier, and many organizations are working to attract and hire directly from law schools.

In this series, ACC will explore this “trend” through interviews with — and topical articles by — new attorneys who have made the move to in-house practice, as well as the in-house counsel who hire and train them.

From the hiring attorney: Also a straight to in-house attorney



Tara Rosnell, associate general counsel, IP at Procter & Gamble (P&G), has a unique story as an attorney who not only started her career in-house, but works for an organization that has supported hiring directly from law schools in the past (herself included). Here, she discusses her career path to P&G, as well as how the company attracted and integrated new in-house lawyers into the legal department and organization as a whole.

ACC: How were you introduced to in-house practice and why did you decide to begin your career in-house? Further, what do you know now that you wish you knew on day one as corporate counsel?

Tara Rosnell (P&G): I was initially introduced to in-house practice when I worked in the analytical chemistry department of a pharmaceutical company as an undergraduate student. I had occasion to work with some of the patent attorneys there, and to understand a bit about what they did. I was very intrigued with the work they did and as a law student I liked the idea of working directly with in-house clients and being a part of the business.

One thing I wish I had done to better prepare for a role as in-house counsel is to have taken some basic business courses as an undergraduate or law student.

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ACC: I understand that P&G has a history of hiring directly from law schools, and therefore several members of the company's current legal team did in fact start their careers in-house. Can you tell us a little bit about why hiring from law schools was a practice supported by P&G, and how that practice has shaped or contributed to the overall culture of the law department?

Rosnell: Procter & Gamble is a promote from within company, and over the years the legal department, like the rest of the company, has also hired at entry level, either directly from law school, or those with a few years of experience in private practice. Therefore, many members of our legal department joined P&G either following an internship during their 2L year or directly from law school. As a result of our "promote from within" practice, we have a strong culture of teaching, training, and development that continues throughout one's career. Also because people at P&G tend to "grow up" together, relationships are the currency at P&G. They are how we get things done.

ACC: Can you tell us a bit about the 2L program, and how recent law school graduates were incorporated into the law department? How was it structured, and what were some of the items students and/or new attorneys worked on?

Tara: The 2L program was designed to allow the student to experience the work that new attorneys at P&G actually do. Interns are assigned actual projects/work, and work directly with internal clients and other lawyers within the division. Legal interns are also connected into social and business activities for interns throughout the company so they get a sense of how the company operates.

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ACC: What advice can you offer to legal departments considering implementing a program for — or simply thinking about expanding their recruiting to attract — law school graduates?

Rosnell: In order to compete for top talent, I would advise legal departments to be on the same schedule as on campus interviews (OCI). In other words, they need to be interviewing students at the end of their 1L summer and making offers in early Fall for 2L summer. The expectation should be that

students get an offer at the end of their 2L summer, if they do a good job. For top diverse talent, it may be necessary to start even earlier, offering summer internships during 1L summer. I would also recommend that they participate in on-campus job fairs during OCI.

ACC: Mentorship is important no matter the profession, or the legal department. Did you have any mentors when you joined Procter & Gamble, or perhaps from law school, who aided in your transition from law student to corporate counsel? How important are internal allies to the success of a new-to-in-house attorney?

Rosnell: Mentorship, whether formal or informal, is an extremely important part of development for any professional, including in-house lawyers. I would recommend that new lawyers seek out different mentors right from the beginning and throughout their careers. However, mentors are not a replacement for a caring and engaged manager. At P&G, we ask a lot of our managers to make sure they are developing their [direct] reports. All managers are required to take a number of trainings so they understand company policies, how to motivate and communicate with employees, and how to deal with challenges that come up, as well as concepts such as implicit bias and equality concepts.

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ACC: Have you been in the role of mentor with new to in-house attorneys there at P&G? Is mentorship a part of the transition for attorneys coming out of law school or into their first in-house role? Can you share some of the ways you advise these attorneys on the practice of law in-house?

Rosnell: We initially assign new attorneys a “buddy”, which is a junior lawyer who helps navigate basics for the first year. Once the lawyer has been with P&G about a year, we ask their interest in having a more senior manager as a mentor. Sometimes we help them choose a mentor and sometimes they approach someone on their own. Either way can work. I have mentored many people throughout my career and it has taken many different forms, depending on what is wanted or need by the mentee. Many times I will operate as a sounding board when the lawyer is struggling with how to handle a particular situation. Other times the relationship is more structured where we meet monthly for lunch, for example. Other times mentees look to me to make recommendations per seeking out particular assignments, for example.

ACC: What would you say are the biggest challenges associated with going directly in-house? What about the opportunities presented that may not have been available as a “first year” or junior attorney at a firm?

Rosnell: One challenge about going directly in-house is that a lot of trust is placed in the lawyer right from the beginning, which can be uncomfortable until the attorney gains some confidence. An in-house legal department can counter-balance this by having a formal training program for newer attorneys. For in-house departments, of course hiring directly in-house presents an additional training burden versus hiring a lawyer with a few years of experience. I think the best opportunity for in-house lawyers versus law firms is the ability to learn the business and work directly with the clients. On the other hand, if a student is interested in litigation for example, a law firms would be a better fit.

> **It is also important to have personal credibility; in other words, do what you say you are going to do when you say you are going to do it.**

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ACC: What advice would you offer law students who aspire to begin their legal careers in-house? What can they do to prepare — are there courses they should consider taking, perhaps outside of typical coursework, that can help them stand out to a corporate employer?

Rosnell: I would advise to take Corporations, as well as Ethics and Compliance classes if offered. Classes such as Employment law; IP; Mergers & Acquisitions; Antitrust; and Real Estate may also be helpful. I would also recommend some basic Finance classes for undergraduate students considering an in-house legal career.

ACC: For those who land a coveted role in a corporate law department, what's next? How do they gain the trust of colleagues and what will help them stand out to their corporate employer (GC and/or CEO)?

Rosnell: Of course it is important to work hard to gain expertise within your legal field so that you are able to provide competent, quality legal advice. It is also important to have personal credibility; in other words, do what you say you are going to do when you say you are going to do it. It is important to listen first to a client's needs and for the client to feel that you are on their side and working to meet their needs. I think it always helps to be prepared to let the business know what you would do if you were in their shoes.

ACC: Having started your career in-house, would you do anything differently? Do you see yourself being an "in-house lifer" (a term I completely just made up!) — continuing to grow in corporate practice?

Rosnell: I love in-house practice and would recommend it highly to lawyers who are interested in learning a variety of different things and in working together with business leaders to solve business problems and meet the needs of the business.

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