



## **ELI: A Gamechanger for In-house Counsel**

**Skills and Professional Development**



ACC's Executive Leadership Institute (ELI) has been educating in-house leaders since its inaugural class in 2014. With each year only allotted 30 spots for candidates, all of whom must report to the CLO, the camaraderie among the classes is appreciated by program graduates. To date, more than 33 ELI graduates have been named general counsel after attending the program. As more ELI graduates move into chief legal officer roles, the *ACC Docket* talked to three graduates who view the ELI experience as a steppingstone for their careers.

Azar Khansari, vice president and associate general counsel of NetScout Systems, Inc., a network assurance and monitoring tech company, says ELI helped her focus on her career. "It allowed me to step back and see my career in a different way," she explains, noting that the typical legal career unfolds in a certain way: law school, first job, specialization in a practice area. She realized she wanted to have a role beyond the legal department. "A lot of people are intimidated by stepping out of the legal role. They got that degree and that's where their expertise lies," she explains.



"It allowed me to step back and see my career in a different way."

- Azar Khansari, vice president and associate general counsel of NetScout Systems, Inc.

Khansari wanted to replicate some of the exercises she participated in during ELI in a company-wide program for executives at Netscout. The exposure to different industries and how they impact one another stuck with her. She really enjoyed ELI's interactive modules, in which a small group of four or five individuals work on a problem to later present to the larger group. Supplemented with speakers, such as prominent GCs, board members of large companies, cybersecurity specialists, as well as organized lunches and mixers to ensure everyone has a chance to meet each other, ELI provided vital networking without feeling forced, Khansari says.

---

Throughout the rollout of Netscout's executive program, Khansari worked closely with the CEO. She realized she loved the role of internal communication, especially at a founder-driven company that requires a CEO to be deeply involved in various initiatives. Recognizing the potential for her to contribute to the company at an enterprise level, she pitched a new position: chief of staff to the CEO. It took some convincing, but ultimately Khansari created a new role where she could help advance initiatives because she was privy to details that are often lost when a message is watered down through the corporate hierarchy.

"I didn't know what to expect — and was nervous honestly," she says of the leadup to ELI. "What I found was a really good mix of attorneys who were all open to learning." It's a sentiment that Scott Jarboe echoes. Now chief legal officer and corporate secretary of Peabody Energy, Jarboe attended ELI in 2018 and was immediately impressed with the cohort of similarly situated in-house lawyers in up-and-coming roles. Jarboe, who was elevated to CLO the same week the COVID-19 pandemic shut down offices around the world, credits ELI's focus on executive relationships as an early lesson for him in the GC role. "The biggest thing I took away from ELI is the importance of building and maintaining relationships with fellow executives. I took steps to do that when I returned from ELI and it has paid off in spades now because I already had those relationships developed," he says. "Being able to call on that well of goodwill in stressful situations — it's been important."



Scott

Jarboe appreciated ELI's focus on relationships.

Cristina Gonzalez, a member of ELI's inaugural class, and now the chief legal officer of Staples, reaches out to other ELI graduates from her year when she needs advice — or to commiserate — and also to benchmark. "The exposure you have into the minds of GCs and boards and CEOs of big companies was great to get me started in preparing for my next step," she remembers. Gonzalez encourages in-house lawyers who are thinking about taking advantage of ELI to bring their authentic selves to the program. "It is a very good program that encompasses not only the legal aspects, but

---

more importantly, the managerial aspects of having to deal with multiple stakeholders, which you may not have had as a deputy general counsel. When you have these group projects and discussions over the course of a week, the helpful relationships develop."



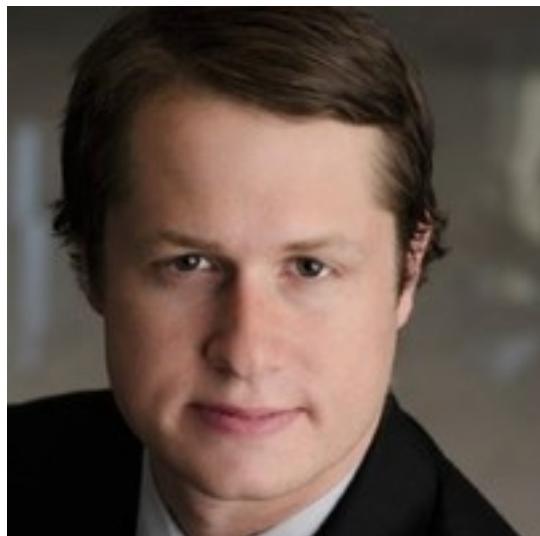
"The exposure you have into the minds of GCs and boards and CEOs of big companies was great to get me started in preparing for my next step."

- Cristina Gonzalez, chief legal officer of Staples

Nominations are open for the next iteration of ELI scheduled to occur in July 2021. Nominees must report directly to the highest-ranking legal officer of an organization, and hold a title such as deputy general counsel, associate general counsel, managing attorney or general counsel for a division, subsidiary or region of the organization. [Nominate now](#), or find more information, on the [ELI webpage](#)

---

[Joshua H. Shields](#)



Editor

Association of Corporate Counsel