

## How Collaboration with Outside Counsel Can Advance Your Career In-House

*Alana Ackels and Jeff Cash*

Do successful in-house lawyers leverage their relationships with outside counsel to advance their careers in-house? They should. We had the privilege of presenting a CLE on this topic on September 22 in front of the ACC. This article summarizes our observations of some of the key ways in which collaboration with outside counsel can be used to advance the careers of in-house attorneys.

### Stay relevant and involved even when outside counsel is hired.

We often hear that in-house teams feel like they are not valued by the business because they are “cost centers” or a “road block” to accomplishing business objectives. In-house lawyers who understand the short-term and long-term goals of the business can leverage the expertise of their outside counsel to find ways to accomplish those goals, even if it is not originally what the business had planned. Collaboration with outside counsel can help you transform from being perceived as a roadblock to being perceived as a creative problem solver.

In-house lawyers should also utilize their relationships with outside counsel to be more proactive, not reactive, on emerging legal issues. This is especially true in compliance-heavy fields like labor and employment, healthcare, or securities; or heavily regulated industries like financial services. Identify specific legal areas that will help advance your career and identify the specialists that can help you stay on top of emerging trends and legal issues. For example, ask your outside counsel to put you on their mailing lists for any client alerts relevant to your field (and politely ask to be excluded from any that aren't relevant to your practice area). Or ask them for a quarterly meeting to hear about what they are seeing in the market. Outside counsel love to entertain clients so make it a value-added experience. If you see an emerging issue, go to your leadership team with a plan to address it. And take credit for being proactive, not reactive, in serving to protect the business.

### Rightsourcing

Evaluate what projects are the highest and best use of your time and try, when possible, to offload everything else. Consider whether you are doing: (i) the right work (track costs; internal and external); (ii) the right way (best use of resources); (iii) with the right people (structure is good); in order to (iv) obtain the right result (win the task).

Consider establishing **valuation** tactics to determine what the work is worth and what it costs you to handle it internally versus sending it to outside counsel. Collaborate with outside counsel to gauge what their costs might be to handle the outsourced work and whether some form of a predictable fee arrangement might be possible. And remember to eliminate work that should no longer be done, such as constant revisions from the business team to certain standard form documents (take control of your business people).

### Outside counsel and business development.

Contrary to popular belief, in-house lawyers still have to develop business. Externally, successful in-house lawyers remain active in the community, network with outside counsel, and remain visible and attractive to other legal departments. Internally, through collaboration, your outside lawyers can be the best cheerleaders and advocates for you in your organization and to the C-Suite, with whom they often interface. Depending on the organization, some in-house lawyers are rarely praised for their efforts. Let us champion the great work that you do. It is a somewhat ironic concept that lawyers aren't good at self-promotion. We get a bad rap because we are opinionated. But strong legal opinions are not remotely connected to self-promotion. The reality is that many lawyers are not comfortable promoting their own accomplishments. Outside counsel is a great support group to champion the success of their in-house contemporaries. Work together. In the end, we are all working for great results for our clients. Collaborating with outside counsel can be great for accomplishing a winning result and for promoting your career. It's a win win.