

## **Ron Bell**

CLO at Collective Health | Interested in Leadership, Ethics, and Innovation

Law students often ask how in-house and outside legal work differ. Ten key differences with advice on how to succeed in-house:

- 1** In-house clients are businesspeople, not lawyers. While law firm lawyers often advise in-house counsel, in-house counsel must explain legal matters to non-lawyers who expect that advice to advance their business goals. Immediately.
- 2** In-house clients want solutions—yesterday. In-house clients want concise advice so they can make business decisions. They want lawyers to get things \*done\*, not just educate them. So when you present options, you must also recommend a course of action.
- 3** Fewer words are better when writing for in-house clients. No in-house client ever asks lawyers to write more. More words are less persuasive in-house.
- 4** A company's business is not the business of law. Law firms monetize legal advice. Companies consider legal work a cost. Your best chance to thrive in-house is to use your professional skills to advance your company's business goals like other service functions do.
- 5** Explaining how is usually more valuable than saying no. While you must always say no to misconduct, in-house jobs more often involve finding ways to reduce risk and to improve business processes.
- 6** You're a repeat player in a long-term game. Law firm lawyers counsel many clients. In-house lawyers serve one company and see its projects through from conception to inception. Success in-house coincides directly to the value of your advice and how it contributes to company success.
- 7** The pace of work is different. In-house lawyers work on tight timelines and on parallel projects, often with frequent interruptions to meet or to converse by Slack. That's because their business clients, who also work this way, demand answers quickly—sometimes in real time.
- 8** Work is more collaborative. In-house lawyers don't bill by the hour, so they can—and often must—collaborate with law department colleagues and with employees in other groups, such as marketing, sales, and finance. EQ, curiosity, and project management skills matter a \*lot\* in-house.
- 9** Opportunities for advancement differ. Law firm career tracks are "clear-cut," while in-house career paths depend upon a company's needs, a lawyer's abilities, and sometimes even whether the lawyer stays in a legal role. Be flexible.
- 10** The culture is different. In-house lawyers typically don't bill hours, but they face intense pressure to deliver actionable results. Your in-house hours may be more predictable than they would be at a law firm, but you will need to work hard to prove you're worth your salary.