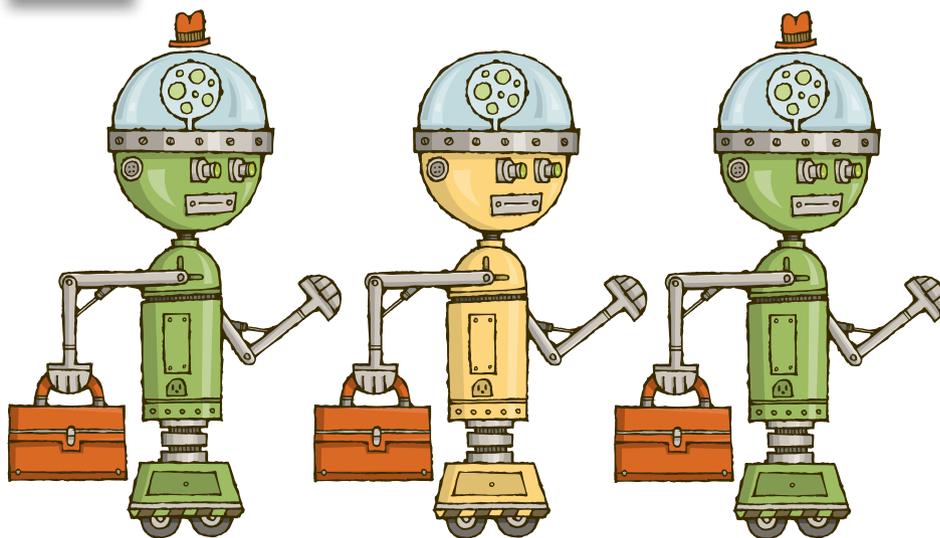


# Moving Up

In a gloomy job market, taking control of your career can make all the difference. *InsideCounsel* asked in-house lawyers and career experts to share their most valued tips. Here is their best advice on how to set yourself apart and jump-start your professional life.



#### THE IN-HOUSE EXPERTS

**Art Chong**, general counsel of Broadcom Corp., former CLO of Safeco Corp.

**Jed Hendrick**, partner at Edwards Angell Palmer & Dodge and former general counsel of Dennison Manufacturing and H.P. Hood.

**Vanessa McKenzie**, business development manager (and former in-house lawyer) at Caterpillar Inc.

**Laurie Robinson**, assistant general counsel at CBS Corp. and founder/CEO of Corporate Counsel Women of Color.

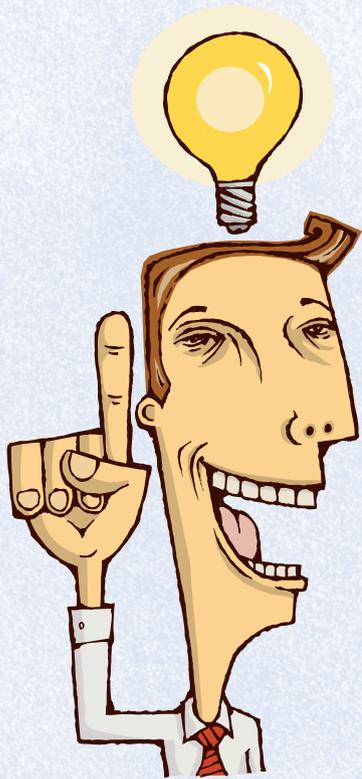
**Stephen Seckler**, managing director of legal recruiter BCG Search.

**Joe Takash**, president and founder of Victory Consulting and author of "Results Through Relationships."

**Vanessa Vidal**, president of in-house search firm ESQ Recruiting.

**Michele Welsh**, senior counsel at Aon Corp.

By **Melissa Maleske**



## Biz-Wisdom

The more you know your company, the more you will know what it wants, what it needs, where it's going, where it's been and what it's asking for.

"The better you understand your business, the more confidence your client will have in you," says McKenzie, an in-house lawyer who got to know her business so well she eventually went over to the business side. McKenzie advocates getting to know your business "from the ground up" by, for instance, taking facility tours and sitting in on as many business meetings as possible.

Chong offers similar advice to young lawyers, suggesting they constantly grow their knowledge of the business. He adds, "I wouldn't limit [knowledge] to the business of the company in which they're working but deeper understanding of the rhythm of business in general."

Whether that means taking business courses, developing relationships with businesspeople or devouring the Wall Street Journal every morning, find what works for you and do it.

"The key is to develop business skills that increase your value to the company," Vidal says. "Having the flexibility to learn new skills, particularly business skills, is very important. You need to keep reinventing yourself to keep your job challenging and make yourself that much more attractive and available for more opportunities."

## Above & Beyond

There is no shortage of lawyers in this world. But the ability and willingness to step up and exceed expectations is rare, and those are the qualities that set apart the top tier of in-house lawyers.

"Understand that you do not add value by just being an excellent lawyer," Robinson says. "That is expected. You add value by doing what is not in your job description. Sometimes it is the very small things that are not already being done that fill a void in your company and in your community."

General counsel, hiring managers and recruiters seek out leaders, so if you can't lead, you'll eventually find yourself crowded out by those who can—even if your technical skills are the gold standard. For staff attorneys who feel like they are led more than they lead, fret not: Even if you're on the lower rungs of the in-house ladder, you can still develop and showcase your leadership skills.

"People often mistake management for leadership," Chong says. "Leadership is a function of your commitment to the task and passion for the job, and that does have the ability to inspire. That's leadership, and that's how you get ahead, more so than the cumulative number of bodies you're managing."

Another part of stepping up is accepting responsibility and its potential consequences. "A lot of in-house counsel like to pass the buck to the outside firm when it comes to making a decision. [Instead,] defend it and take responsibility for it," Hendrick says.

### Business Crossovers

McKenzie was doing M&As in private practice when she began to realize she might be better suited for the business side of things.

"Operating at [a broader] level is more fulfilling for me than drafting a document and worrying about commas," she says.

She eased into things by first joining the legal department at Caterpillar, which came with the enviable perk of a fully paid University of Chicago MBA. After a few years of doing M&As in the Cat law department, she was familiar with the pulse of the company and many of its business people. Eventually, she was tapped for a business role by her current boss, another former Cat lawyer.

"There are whole vistas of opportunities that open up once you go in-house," Chong says. "In-house lawyers go on to become CEOs, CFOs, run business units."

And given the limited number of legal spots at the top, a temporary jaunt on the business side could set you apart.

"I have seen a lot of attorneys transition from legal to the business side and back into legal just to try to make that upward movement happen," Vidal says.

# Straight Talk

When Hendrick was a GC, he sought in his employees the ability to interact on a peer-to-peer level with business managers—or, as he puts it, being able to walk the walk and talk the talk.

“You always have to prove you’re the best lawyer in the room, but if you can add to that another dimension of really being able to talk the business and understand it in the business context, I think that’s what sets good business lawyers apart,” he says.

So speak in the context and language of business, not the law, and communicate clearly. Take it from a nonlawyer: Takash has two attorney brothers who often speak in legalese, frustrating the family. If a brother can get fed up with a lawyer’s inability to communicate on a human level, imagine how your client feels.

“Attorneys have to understand that there’s anxiety and/or uneasiness in the potential consequences of why they are coming to [the client],” Takash says. “Being a human who can empathize and show compassion to me creates a complete lawyer.”

And don’t forget that communication goes both ways. Listen to your clients, be open to suggestions and make sure you understand each other, Takash says. “Telling is just data-dumping. The good lawyers teach.”

# Discomfort Zone

“Will you take on this terrifying project? It’s something you’ve never done before, it doesn’t play to your strengths, and you’ll probably mess up somewhere along the way.”

Such requests are never so blatant, but if you have the courage to try something new, it could turn into the best learning experience of your life.

“You might stumble, but you also have an opportunity to stretch and grow,” Chong says. “Don’t stay within your comfort zone just because you’re good at something—take the chance of doing something you’re either unfamiliar with or not so good at, so you can grow.”

Such moves can be just as valuable when they take place outside the legal department. Robinson took such a leap when she decided to start Corporate Counsel Women of Color—a move that bettered her legal career as well as her professional life generally. “I did not take one course on how to start your own business or how to create or run a non-profit,” she says. “I jumped in and was able to do it by instinct. I learned so much and still continue to learn.”

## Back to the Firm

The historical view of going in-house is that it’s a one-way ticket that essentially closes a lawyer’s book of business and thus forecloses a return to a law firm career. But these days, as the role of in-house counsel has become more enmeshed with business decisions, the trend is shifting.

“There are increasing numbers of attorneys who are finding that their careers can go full circle,” Vidal says. “They’ve seen it from the other side, they understand what clients really want, and they have made more connections on the business side than they would have at the firm.”

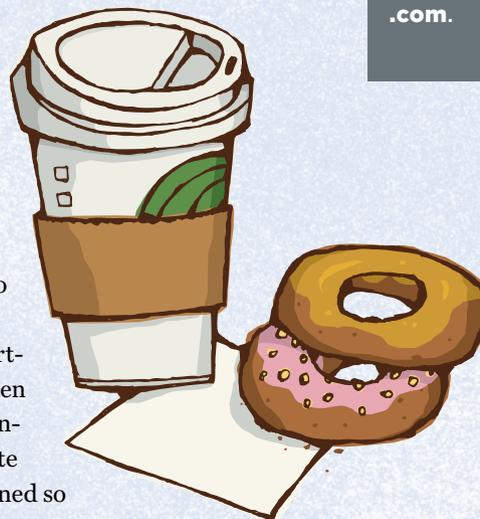
She notes that in-house counsel develop a technical expertise that only a lawyer fully enmeshed in a company’s business can have. Still, the transition is rare and usually reserved for the more senior levels—a GC becoming a partner, for example.

“Few people try going from in-house to outside, and even fewer succeed at it,” Hendrick says. “It’s just very difficult for some people to start a business after having one company being their sole source of business for so long. Don’t try doing what I did unless you’ve got a good appetite for risk.”

For additional career tips, visit [InsideCounsel.com](http://InsideCounsel.com).



FIND MORE ONLINE



# It's who you know

"You're as likely if not more likely to find a position by talking to a business person as you are by looking at classified ad listings or talking to a recruiter," Seckler says. "In fact, I think those more traditional job search strategies are not as likely to be as effective unless they're combined with a heavy dose of networking and getting out in the community and meeting professionals."

You shouldn't reserve networking for looking for an exit out of your current company—networking within your own company can help you do your job better and more smoothly and thus stand out to your superiors or even grab the attention of a business unit.

"Within Caterpillar, you'd want to network more with business folks and the attorneys in the entire legal organization because those are your resources," McKenzie says. "And the more you know them and develop a relationship with them, you get quicker responses. You can just call them up and ask quick questions—you just get things done more quickly."



# ...and what you know

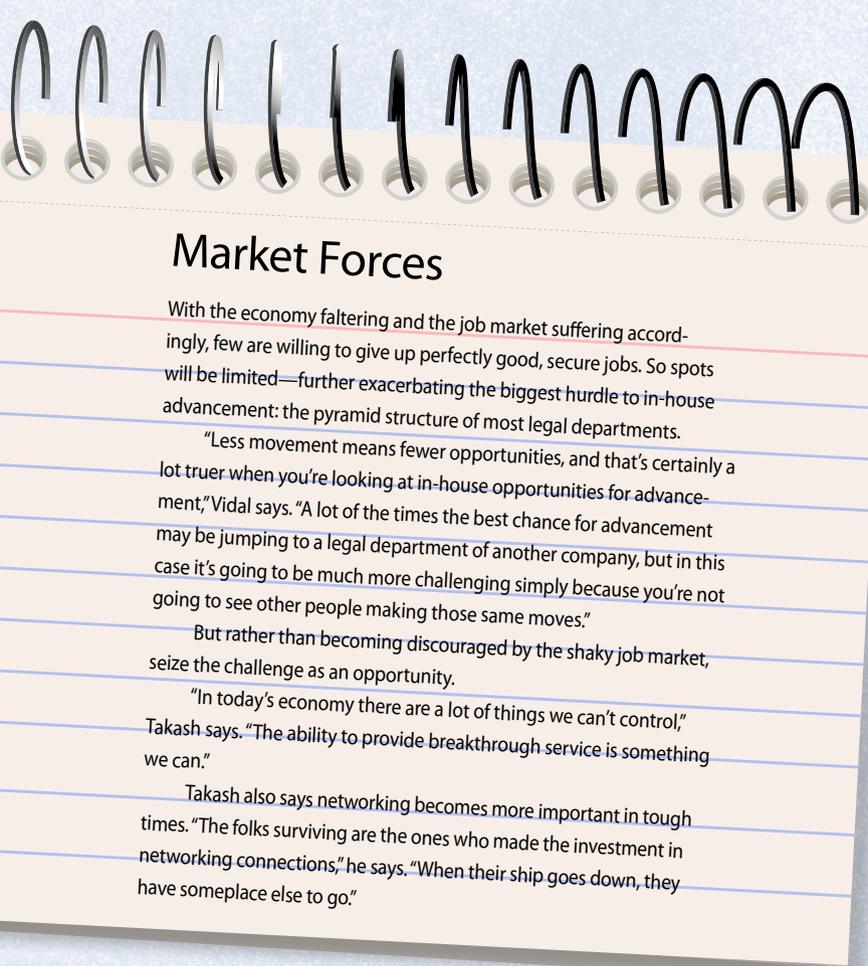
The wisest people know they don't know much, and the same is true for the best lawyers.

Every situation is an opportunity to learn—even the routine projects you've done a thousand times before. Welsh reminds herself constantly that she can learn from everything and everybody, setting her up for future success.

"Even when I do confidentiality agreements all day, every day, when I go about doing a new one it's with a new person, or there could be a new industry I learn about or just a new interaction from which I gain something. Squeeze out of every experience the actual, real knowledge," she says. "Don't fall asleep on the job. Build your skill set, so that by the time you get to where it is you want to go, you're that much more of an attractive applicant."

If you've got your sights set on the GC spot, you should aim to have knowledge across the board—companies will look for people with experience that ranges from antitrust to tax, from litigation to labor and employment. And depending on the company, it could expect you to have knowledge about specialty fields like technology and environmental law.

"Make sure you're constantly adding to your package of skills as you move along in your career so that you've done any number of different things by the time you may be considered to be a general counsel," Hendrick says.



## Market Forces

With the economy faltering and the job market suffering accordingly, few are willing to give up perfectly good, secure jobs. So spots will be limited—further exacerbating the biggest hurdle to in-house advancement: the pyramid structure of most legal departments.

"Less movement means fewer opportunities, and that's certainly a lot truer when you're looking at in-house opportunities for advancement," Vidal says. "A lot of the times the best chance for advancement may be jumping to a legal department of another company, but in this case it's going to be much more challenging simply because you're not going to see other people making those same moves."

But rather than becoming discouraged by the shaky job market, seize the challenge as an opportunity.

"In today's economy there are a lot of things we can't control," Takash says. "The ability to provide breakthrough service is something we can."

Takash also says networking becomes more important in tough times. "The folks surviving are the ones who made the investment in networking connections," he says. "When their ship goes down, they have someplace else to go."

# Linking In

You don't pay the membership fee to bar associations and other professional organizations just for the after-work cocktail parties and conferences in vacation-worthy locales. Exposure to and participation in such groups can be invaluable to your career and overall skill set.

Robinson says the professional benefits are twofold. Involvement gives an opportunity to network and share best practices with other professionals and to build leadership and organizational skills you may not be getting on the job.

Of course, you only get back what you put in. Taking a leadership role within an organization will pay off more than simply showing up at meetings. Robinson's involvement goes above and beyond. In 2004 she founded a professional organization, Corporate Counsel Women of Color (CCWC), to empower female attorneys and foster diversity in the legal profession. She credits the experience of being CEO of CCWC with helping her become a more well-rounded professional and contribute more value to the CBS legal department.

And it's paid off, as evidenced by Robinson's recent promotion from assistant general counsel of CBS's television division to assistant general counsel of the parent company—a role the company created for her.

"Through the years, CCWC has helped me to develop into a multidimensional person," Robinson says. "I am able to function in many other areas that are not necessarily law-related, such as marketing, public relations, publishing, sales, fundraising, product development, branding, production and programming." n



## From the Top

No matter how much an in-house lawyer wants to move up in the world, it's nearly impossible to thrive as a lawyer without support from the top. GCs and other leaders in the legal department are in a unique role to mentor and encourage their employees to broaden and deepen their knowledge of the business and the role of the legal department within it.

"I encourage [law department leaders] to spend as much time mentoring and teaching as possible, because you learn by teaching," Chong says. "And the way you advance the success of your organization is to advance the people who are working for you. Do not give short shrift to the development of your people."

If you're not getting that support, asking for it can be surprisingly successful. Vidal advocates being proactive about getting support from the higher echelons. Being open with higher-ups not only will help you thrive in your current position, it could help you find the next.

"Develop a career plan and share it with executives and your GC," she says. "It's really important to discuss your career aspirations with your current employer so they're aware what opportunities you might be interested in."

## Recruiter Rules

Many lawyers find their jobs through legal recruiters, one way or another—either longstanding relationships or out-of-the-blue calls. But some experts insist they're not the last word in finding the perfect in-house job. While working with recruiters can't hurt, there are limitations.

"Recruiters are part of the strategy, but in reality when it comes to in-house jobs, unlike in law firms, companies don't all use search firms for filling their legal positions," Seckler says. "Furthermore, while in any given geography most of the major recruiting firms will be aware of the openings at all of the major law firms, in terms of in-house jobs, that's not true. Different search firms will have different openings, so you wouldn't want to work with just one search firm."

While the highest positions of legal departments are more often filled using headhunters, such recruiters tend to act as gatekeepers, so it could be hard to establish a relationship with them. Be an exemplary lawyer and try to set yourself apart, and when they want you, they'll make the first move.

"I've heard a recruiter on a panel say, 'Don't call us, we'll call you,'" Chong says. "To which someone replied, 'How will you know who we are if we don't call you?' He said, 'Well, that's our job.'"