

SVBJ EVENT

Corporate Counsel Secrets of success

While we tend to view the law community as formal and conservative, the dynamic world of the in-house counsel often presents a different picture. Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in Silicon Valley. On November 6, 2013, Business Journal publisher James MacGregor joined host Steve Hemminger, Partner in Charge at Alston & Bird, for a conversation with five top local corporate attorneys about their jobs, their experience, and their advice for law students contemplating careers as in-house counsel.



Steve Hemminger
Partner-In-Charge
– Alston & Bird

Steve Hemminger is partner-in-charge of the firm's Silicon Valley office and serves as a Joint Venture Silicon Valley Board Member. As a seasoned litigator, he focuses his practice primarily on complex intellectual property disputes involving patents, trademarks and trade secrets, representing his clients as plaintiffs and defendants. Mr. Hemminger has been lead counsel in more than 40 high-stakes intellectual property litigation matters.

TAKEAWAY

"Law firms are constantly evolving. They aren't as lock-step as they used to be. The insights provided here are a must-read for both in-house and outside counsel in Silicon Valley."

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Vineeta Gajwani
Senior Counsel of IP
– Electronic Arts Inc.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

"The biggest tool is really just prioritization and being realistic about what your goals are. And then communicating with my clients so that I know what they expect from us, and letting them know what it is that we can deliver."

PARTNERING WITH IN-HOUSE COUNSEL

"Having good quality legal work is obviously also one of the biggest priorities. But the other big priority is that I have to manage a budget, and you've gone way off the map of the budget you originally gave me, I need some communication about that."

GETTING THERE

"What attracted me to go in-house was the job description — a substantive mix of trademark law and IP litigation work."

TAKEAWAY

"Always know what your top-three 'dream jobs' are."

ADVICE FOR CURRENT LAW STUDENTS

"It's easy to find success when you're very passionate about the legal issues that you're working on."



Catherine Lacavera
Director, IP and Litigation
– Google Inc.

PARTNERING WITH IN-HOUSE COUNSEL

"Send me a dirty draft. Let's see it early. Let's be part of the dialog to get something on file. Part of it is cost pressures, as well, growing to scale, in-sourcing more of the work that we do, and getting consistency across maybe 200 cases."

ADVICE FOR CURRENT LAW STUDENTS

"They should figure out what makes sense for them in terms of a specialty, and create a niche practice area for themselves... I don't think any of us have a crystal ball of where the legal profession is going. I do think it's diversifying. It's specializing."

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

"I think we also have a responsibility for our teams, to lead by example. And you have to define your boundaries."

GETTING THERE

"A colleague actually pointed me to the position at Google. He said, 'Look. There's this really cool company. They're looking for a patent attorney. Why don't you apply?..' It was not an easy decision for me to go to Google."

ADVICE FOR CURRENT LAW STUDENTS

"You can do literally anything with a law degree. There was no such thing as surf law when I was in law school, and now I've even had the privilege of teaching coastal law and policy at Stanford."

GETTING THERE

"I started with the Surfrider Foundation, in-house general counsel. In 1991, I left Surfrider and joined the Sierra Club. Five years ago, I left the Sierra Club to become general counsel at O'Neill Wetsuits."

TAKEAWAY

"I would say take risks, work hard, and be adamant that public resources are protected for future generations."

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

"Fortunately for me, recreation, and spending time at the beach is an important part of the culture of O'Neill Wetsuits."



Mark Massara
General Counsel and VP of Social Responsibility
– O'Neill Wetsuits

TAKEAWAY

"I'm only where I am because I have amazing mentors. At the end of the day, I think you've got to ask for what you think you want, because sometimes just asking is what people fail to do."

ADVICE FOR CURRENT LAW STUDENTS

"I would say always look for the new thing, and if it looks interesting to you, jump on it. Right now, I see privacy, cyber security, cloud computing as very edgy issues that are expanding phenomenally."

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

"I just want to dispel the myth that in-house is a lifestyle choice. You've got to come from your gut. That said, I'm not a service to my clients if I don't have other interests and activities, if I'm not reading up on things that are going on in the world."

PARTNERING WITH IN-HOUSE COUNSEL

"I think that the practice is different on different coasts and in different parts of the country, but I think it's all sort of converging. I think none of us have the luxury of cases just in one state or even one country any more."



Angela Padilla
VP, Head of Litigation and Compliance
– VMware

ADVICE FOR CURRENT LAW STUDENTS

"Don't feel that your whole career has to be just a straight line. Make it much more zig-zaggy. Take chances."

GETTING THERE

"My current position was an example of serendipity. I was in private practice, first as a partner at Morrison & Foerster, and then I briefly lateraled over to Orrick Herrington. Then a colleague of mine became the general counsel at VMware. She needed a head of litigation. She called me, and, before you knew it, I landed at VMware."

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

"If you choose to be with a high-growth company, you can expect to be technologically available basically 24/7."

TAKEAWAY

"In order to really be an effective litigator, I think you've got to first-chair your own jury trials."

PARTNERING WITH IN-HOUSE COUNSEL

"Number one, bring people who understand our technology and can match it to the case that's pending. Number two, tell us you have a lean and mean strategy for winning. And number three, come with a diverse team. Don't wear a suit and tie. We want you to kind of look more like us."