

GC Impact: Sarah Feingold

By Sarah Feingold | October 01, 2018 at 02:08 PM

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Photo: David Handschuh/ALM

Sarah Feingold, general counsel, Vroom

Q: How is the role of general counsel evolving, and how have you adapted?

A: A general counsel's practice is "T" shaped. We must know a little bit about all legal areas that impact our client while also being the absolute legal expert on our client. But general counsels can no longer solely focus on law and take the most risk averse route. We have evolved to be legal partners empowering the company to scale, protecting it from liability, and fixing issues. We must understand all aspects of our client's business including its goals and risk profile and budget. Additionally, we must keep on top of the changing legal landscape. And for a small legal team in a highly competitive technology space, we cannot be successful unless we speak the lingo of our colleagues and support a positive company culture. I've adapted by being curious, requesting capped outside counsel fees, and striving to always add value.

Q: How do you find it most effective to develop leadership skills, and to foster them in others?

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A: There are five lessons I have learned throughout my career. I use these lessons myself and try to instill them in others at Vroom and via various speaking engagements.

1) Create opportunities – If there is something that needs changing, for you, your career, or your client take responsibility and change it. Become the expert. Volunteer yourself to speak, pitch the article, start the business, create the art, take the class, learn the topic, apply to the job, and reach out to your shero. 2) Welcome “no.” – If you want something, ask. Hearing “no” is proof you tried. Gather strength from your failure lessons. 3) Use all the brains you have and all the brains you can borrow – You are surrounded by teachers. Read the articles, do the research, participate in the conferences, and ask questions to your network. 4) Be kind – To everyone. Period. 5) Say yes – Don’t let imposter syndrome get the best of you. When an opportunity overwhelms you, take it (or someone else will).

Q: What is the most effective time-management tool or technique you employ?

A: To take advantage of my time strengths, I block out time for when I’ll be the most productive. For example, in the mornings I dive deep into reading contracts, research, and writing. Late afternoons are better for meetings, negotiation, and phone calls. To keep track of all my projects, I use a to-do list, which fits on one piece of paper (in very small print). I review every line and rewrite the list weekly. Email is not my to-do list. I use post-its for ideas and then incorporate them into projects. And like David Allen suggest in “Getting Things Done,” if something can be accomplished in two minutes or less, I do it immediately.

Q: What is your best advice for in-house lawyers trying to make an impact, with their corporate clients and beyond?

A: In-house lawyers must be trusted advisers. They must understand their client’s business, goals, budget and risk profile. Although a lawyer’s brain may think of all the ways something could be a problem, an in-house lawyer must research the probability of that thing happening and then find a tangible solution that works for the company. Be a collaborative business partner. Always write in plain English, not legalese. And it doesn’t hurt to keep candy on your desk.

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