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Network Spotlight: Law Department Management

Interviews and Profiles

Law Department Management





Tim Philips

CHIEF LEGAL AND RISK OFFICER & ASSISTANT SECRETARY

AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY, INC.

ATLANTA, GEORGIA USA

LAW DEPARTMENT MANAGEMENT

As chief legal and risk officer and assistant secretary of the American Cancer Society (Society), Tim Philips leads a dedicated team in their efforts to develop, implement, and maintain legal and risk management strategies that advance and protect the Society's mission to save lives, celebrate lives and lead the fight for a world without cancer. Prior to joining the Society, he spent eight years in private practice and has become an internationally recognized faculty member and lecturer on topics related to risk management, governance, legal operations, and joint ventures. Philips received his B.S. from the U.S. Naval Academy and served as a commissioned officer in the Naval Special Warfare (SEAL) Community. He earned his J.D. from the University of Virginia, is a native of Washington, DC, and currently lives in Marietta, GA with his wife and their two sons.

What interested you in the in-house practice of law, and how did you come to be in your current position?

My decision to depart private practice and enter life in-house was the result of a fair amount of prayerful discernment and a phone call. My wife and I were expecting the birth of our first son, and that triggered a great deal of consideration on my part about priorities. I also determined that client service was what gave me the most job satisfaction. So, when the call from a former firm colleague came, I gladly accepted the opportunity to serve the Society. I have not looked back. As I like to say, with the firm, I was on the treadmill. Working in house, I am on a run.

What is the single greatest challenge that your law department is facing today, and how are you dealing with it?

I believe the challenge we face is what most, if not all, in-house departments face: achieving true integration with the business we serve. And I believe the way to overcome this challenge is to operate the law department, itself, like a business. This can transform the interaction with legal into one where the business you support views the department as something more than an advisor or some “check” on their behavior. Rather, the department will gain its seat at the table as a valued member of the decision team. And in my year as chair of the Law Department Management Network, I will be providing the ACC membership with tools, resources, and techniques, as well as the coaching, to engage in this transformation. We have referred to it as becoming the “Unicorn Lawyer.”



Network Information

Congrats on your recent appointment to chair of the Law Department Management Network (LDMN). How did you initially get involved with the network?

I have been fortunate to serve in a variety of leadership roles with ACC – first with the Nonprofit Organizations Network and then as a member of the LDMN's leadership team. I became particularly

invested in the network once I assumed the role of chief legal officer within my organization and recognized how integrated the relationship between department management and leadership had become. To me the best way to learn is to get involved, so I signed up to be a part of the strategy and operations team of the network, then led the Annual Meeting programs efforts, and finally served as vice chair under the leadership of Steve Roth, ACC's 2018 Member of the Year, who besides setting an amazing example of how to be an "all in" ACC member, also led our network to be recognized as the ACC Network of the Year. I have huge shoes to fill, but I feel prepared to lead the team!

What are some of the ways that the Law Department Management Network provides value to its members?

Put simply, we help our members take their performance to the next level. How? We provide the tolls, training, and resources that increase our members' legal expertise, build their business acumen, and develop personal skill sets, which will set them apart. We are fortunate to have a committed sponsor, Seyfarth Shaw, to assist us with the development of leading practice content for the law department leaders and those who aspire to be law department leaders. We leverage our monthly meetings to provide legal quick hits on current topics facing the modern law department, ranging from technology integration to human resources optimization. Other tools, such as the Top Tens and webcast productions, are designed to provide practical tips that can be put to work immediately by members to improve their skills and advance the development of their law department's business integration.

What substantive practice issues does your network address?

We address department metrics, technology integration, human resource management and optimization, C-suite integration, risk management, business communication and personal skills development, and a range of other topics critical to the advancement of a winning approach to department leadership.

How has the Law Department Management Network helped you in your career?

I consider LDMN critical to my development as the leader I have become. The skills the network provides and enhances are extremely valuable. But it is truly the relationships that matter. If one attends the Annual Meeting business meeting, it becomes all too apparent how close the network's leadership has become. There is an entire table filled with prior chairs. There is no other network that reflects that level of commitment. And we are committed to the mission, the mission to work tirelessly to improve every ACC member's skills as lawyers who lead.

Please join us in the cause. You will not regret it!

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