



2021 ACC Top 10 30-Something: Joanne Flack

Interviews and Profiles



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TOP 10
30-
somethings
2021



Joanne Flack
Senior Director, Legal
Rackspace Technology
USA

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Growing up in the economically depressed Midlands of the United Kingdom, where class status is entrenched, becoming a lawyer wasn't on Joanne Flack's radar. She was fortunate to have a

mentor, a kickboxing coach, who encouraged her to believe she could do whatever she put her mind to, starting with obtaining her black belt at 12 years of age. Joanne saw the potential of law for a curious mind, and decided she wanted to be at the vanguard of law and technology.

Joanne is now senior director of legal for Rackspace Technology, a company that constantly reinvents itself to suit the needs of its customers, an approach that dovetails perfectly with her desire to explore different legal issues. Rackspace Technology developed the world's first open-source cloud alongside NASA. It has evolved into an industry-leading end-to-end multicloud technology services company.

"Our company is fundamentally about technology transformation," Joanne explains. "We ask, 'What are you trying to achieve?' and work backward from there." Rackspace Technology designs, builds, and operates its customers' cloud environments across all major technology platforms; and partners with customers at every stage of their cloud journey to enable them to modernize applications, build new products, and adopt innovative technologies.

She oversees a team of 12 legal professionals that support all procurement and supply chain work, advises on the development of all solutions and services, and handles all customer success legal matters. Joanne describes her role as "lovely" because her team gets to see the nuts-and-bolts of what the customer experiences. "It's a wonderful structure for continuous improvement in such a customer obsessed business," she adds.

In order to facilitate learning across five locations across three regions — the United States, EMEA, and APJ — Joanne started a learning and development program that addresses core in-house skills and commercial grounding, regardless of region. Joanne is herself completing an MBA at Imperial College London's renowned program where she is a Dean's Excellence Award scholar. "All in-house lawyers need to listen, think strategically and with commerciality, and challenge assumptions," she notes.

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Being an expert in technology solutions naturally makes her want to implement them in the legal function. Like any legal department, Rackspace deals with routine tasks, high-value strategic decisions, and gray areas that follow formulaic patterns but have upside risk. The team noticed that they were giving certain fragments of legal advice again and again.

For situations that require in-house analysis, and unfold in predictable ways, such as onboarding a new customer or a standard contract negotiation, Joanne implemented text automation in her team

that allowed them to put together advice in a few minutes, rather than half an hour.

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"It's almost like a menu, depending on the circumstance," she explains. Not only does the legal department work faster, so more time can be spent on more strategic priorities, but it also provides more consistency and accuracy because everyone is using the same phrases. "We always want to integrate tools, especially if they can provide data that allows us to spot trends." By harnessing data in systems and tools, it's easy to see how the legal department dispenses advice.

Joanne's in-house contributions don't end at Rackspace. She also serves on [ACC Washington Chapter](#)'s Diversity Committee and is co-chair of the chapter's Pro Bono Committee. Her upbringing showed her the value of community contributions and she has worked with nonprofits in England and the United States. "If it's important to you, you will get back more than you give," Joanne counsels.

She recalls a young lady who enrolled at a scuba school Joanne established in England as a PADI Master Instructor. The girl had terrible phobias. Years later, the young woman reached out, thanking Joanne for showing her that a bigger world exists, and she could scuba dive or even become a lawyer. And in fact, the young student had just become a UK-qualified solicitor. "That one phone call made all the effort worth it, and emphasized that much of the reward of my role is the ability to positively impact others," Joanne says.

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Editor

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