



Law Firm Alchemy: Turning Professional Contacts Into Career Gold

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Cheat Sheet

- **Stay ahead of the game.** As in-house counsel, one way to succeed in your current position is to apply what you have learned from law firms to stay knowledgeable in specialized areas.
- **Network.** Building strong relationships with law firms assists in-house lawyers in connecting with other external resources and specialists for expertise.
- **Take advantage of your opportunities.** Work alongside law firm contacts to broaden your external reputation and enhance your personal brand.
- **Favor for a favor.** Law firms can both expand their business opportunities and help in-house counsel seek and secure new legal roles.

Over their careers, in-house counsel will have countless interactions with law firms. Many of these interactions are explicitly transactional: the in-house lawyer reaches out seeking assistance on a legal issue, and outside counsel aid, for a cost. For in-house counsel, though, the interactions that occur *outside* the attorney-client context may be far more valuable — indeed, they may be the key to unlocking career success (and, in some cases, lifelong friendships!).

Below, we outline ways that in-house lawyers can leverage their law firm partnerships beyond transactional exchanges to accelerate their careers in three different contexts:

(1) At their current companies,

(2) As they build their personal brands, and

(3) When they are ready to explore external opportunities.

This advice is not academic: We drew from our experiences and spoke to over a dozen lawyers at various stages in their in-house careers. Our hope is that this article will assist in-house lawyers looking to turn their law firm contacts into career gold.

Of course, as Arian and Kim (this article's two law firm authors) will attest, this is a mutually beneficial relationship. Outside counsel who contribute actively to the professional success of their in-house counterparts will also benefit by growing and strengthening their network of successful (and grateful!) in-house contacts.

And as these partnerships deepen, law firm lawyers will gain a better understanding of their clients' strategies and how companies and their legal departments operate. This will allow them to deepen their value and relationships by providing proactive ideas and services. So, in-house counsel should not be shy about asking the law firms for their partnership!

[Join authors Stephen Mar and Bree Thompson as they share insights and anecdotes from their in-house careers during a webcast on July 23!](#)

Using law firm contacts to succeed

Other than providing excellent legal counsel, perhaps the most important thing firm lawyers can do to help their in-house counterparts succeed in their current roles is to *make them look good* in front of their internal stakeholders. Two qualities of highly respected in-house lawyers are the ability to provide prompt and excellent legal advice and to stay ahead of the curve on market trends and legal developments relevant to the company. Law firms can help in-house counsel sharpen both qualities

through a variety of ways.

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Law firm publications



Establishing strong connections with law firms that specialize in relevant areas ensures a steady influx of industry insights. Law firm publications “are often the first step in our process of figuring out what we need to know about a new development and how that needs to be operationalized.” ([Yean Do, Senior Counsel, Business & Legal Affairs, Roku, Inc.](#))

Publications also offer additional opportunities for in-house lawyers to approach law firms with follow-up questions, which can lead to new connections within the firm or opportunities to strengthen existing relationships. Keep in mind, however, that law firms all create many of these “client alerts.” Outside counsel should understand their clients’ business, strategy and legal issues to ensure relevant insights are provided, along with an explanation of the value they may provide.

“Crash courses”



Multiple in-house counsel found law firms helpful for getting up to speed quickly on a new area of law. “Whenever I need a crash course in an emerging area of law, I give a quick call to one of my firm partners, and they can assemble the necessary experts and materials to provide a cutting-edge education. It is a great way for me to learn about a new area and a terrific way for the firm to highlight their expertise in case I need to dive deeper.” ([Tarek Sultani, General Counsel, JLL Technologies](#))

Templates

In-house counsel should also consider utilizing the vast library of template agreements, checklists (e.g., diligence lists), and policies that many law firms have.

[Check out ACC’s Resource Library.](#)



“One of my law firm contacts passed along resources related to the new SEC Clawback Rules — including a template policy. The template ended up becoming a crucial resource in building out the policy for my company and helped me to get smart on important nuances to consider.” ([Devon Klein, Legal Counsel, Palantir Technologies](#))

Formal discussions

Law firms often host discussions, seminars, and CLE sessions, which can keep in-house counsel abreast of emerging trends, regulatory shifts, and best practices. One in-house GC who works abroad mentioned that he was able to keep current on his CLEs thanks to a virtual CLE program that a law firm provided him access to. A few in-house counsel we spoke to brought law firm contacts to their legal departments for CLE presentations or informal “fireside chats.” The in-house legal departments benefited from specific and topical discussions tailored to them, and outside counsel gained access to more potential clients. Law firms also often have training programs for their associates that can be valuable for in-house counsel to attend. These programs can be great opportunities to build relationships, learn and network together.

“Gut checks”



Several in-house counsel cited the importance of their law firm colleagues for informal, off-the-clock “gut checks.” Sometimes these gut checks take the form of a second opinion on a legal issue or a tough judgment call. But often, we found that in-house counsel sought gut checks on business issues, such as “benchmarking on non-legal issues ranging from risk appetite and management, to deal processes and legal tech/AI adoption, which I find important to my ability to be a pragmatic deal lawyer.” ([Alice Ha, Sr. Legal Counsel, M&A, PayPal](#)) For these quick judgment calls and gut checks, having a go-to list of “a few law firm contacts” with whom one has forged strong relationships over time may be preferable to seeking advice from contacts across many different law firms. ([Donna Krouzman, Director, Litigation, WeWork](#))



Done correctly, these gut-check sessions can be mutually beneficial. “I’m lucky to have built trust with my law firm partners who help me gut check issues, and who I use to differentiate between issues that are complicated enough to merit legal spend and those issues I can handle on my own. When a law firm contact helps me wade through an issue on a 20-minute phone call, it builds credibility that when they advise me that more law firm time is needed, I can trust them to handle matters judiciously.” ([Amanda Kauth, Deputy GC, Check Technologies](#))

Referrals



When dealing with a complex legal issue, an in-house lawyer's ability to secure the right referral can be pivotal. Even if a outside counsel cannot provide the answer directly, they can serve as a crucial gateway to a vast network of experts or other clients facing similar challenges. When faced with a specialized challenge, reaching out to outside counsel can lead to targeted referrals, whether for legal counsel or other professional expertise. "External counsel have often connected me with other industry contacts — specialist law firms, local counsel, or other professionals, *e.g.*, insurance brokers — that have been engaged in the matters that I am working on and who help further the deal or who are just the right fit for the situation." ([David Becker, Assistant General Counsel, Centerbridge Partners, L.P.](#)) One in-house M&A lawyer even found that her law firm contacts were useful in sourcing potential deal counterparties!

Cultivating relationships with law firms allows in-house lawyers to tap into a diverse pool of specialists, ensuring they can quickly find the precise expertise needed. By leveraging these contacts thoughtfully, in-house lawyers can bolster their own problem-solving capabilities and demonstrate a keen understanding of when and how to access external resources for their organization's benefit. In the fast-paced legal landscape, the ability to secure the right referral can be a strategic advantage that sets in-house lawyers apart as effective and resourceful leaders.

Using law firm contacts to build your external profile

In-house counsel can also work with their law firm colleagues to build their external reputations within the broader industry or legal community.

Branding opportunities



In today's world, many in-house counsel wish to build their external "brand" or presence through media features and similar opportunities. Law departments are increasingly supportive of these efforts, as — done correctly — they can also be beneficial to the company. Outside counsel can help with this due to their existing professional networks, and through firm resources that may not be available to in-house counsel. For example, Stephen received his first publication feature when one of his law firm's PR teams introduced him to a legal journalist. That one interaction led to an established relationship with multiple legal publications that frequently reach out to him as a "thought leader" on legal and leadership topics. Another in-house lawyer's relationship with a law firm partner played a role in her being featured in a publication geared toward Hispanic business executives. "The firm's support both for me and for diversity in the legal profession meant a lot personally and professionally and strengthened my relationship with the firm." ([Mary Beth Martinez, Legal Director, Insomnia Cookies](#))

Speaking and writing opportunities

Many in-house counsel also wish to grow their industry presence through speaking and writing engagements. Law firm contacts can help here as well. Many law firms are members and/or sponsors of numerous bar associations and other external organizations. This means that law firms have access to many external speaking opportunities. Firms will provide many of those opportunities to their own lawyers but will also offer some to interested in-house counsel.

Law firms also routinely host panel discussions and CLEs that include representatives from in-house counsel. Several in-house counsel we spoke to had examples where law firm contacts invited them to sit on panels or provided speaking opportunities at organizations with which the firms had professional relationships.

Law firms and law firm lawyers also publish industry alerts, long-form articles, and other pieces throughout the year. Many of them would welcome the opportunity to "co-author" an article with in-house counsel, particularly on topics of shared interest. (This article is a good example!) Such partnerships are mutually beneficial: the in-house counsel builds their industry presence and expertise, and the law firm builds the relationship with the in-house counsel and showcases their ability to collaborate with clients.

Networking opportunities

Law firms can also provide in-house counsel networking opportunities beyond the next career opportunity.

It is becoming increasingly common for lawyers to serve on boards as experts, consultants, and in other “career-adjacent” capacities. Law firms may have a client that is looking for an independent director or for someone with specific expertise for a deal or litigation matter and may be able to connect their client with in-house counsel who can add value. As noted earlier, in-house counsel can increase their odds of being selected for such opportunities by engaging and networking actively with their law firm contacts.



Many in-house counsel believe that connections with law firm contacts who link them to peers facing similar challenges can significantly advance their careers. This can be particularly useful for CLOs/GCs and specialists, who are unlikely to have peers they can consult at their own companies. One in-house lawyer found the ability to make connections to be pivotal early in his in-house career. “My CLO introduced me to the managing partner of a law firm, a former president of the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (NAPABA), who graciously invited me to NAPABA’s annual conference. The conference provided the opportunity to engage with fellow in-house counsel and to participate in industry-specific discussions about the evolving legal landscape. It also became a platform to establish connections with other law firms.” ([Sean Sy, Commercial Counsel, Emburse, Inc.](#))



For another, “the panels, workshops and seminars that law firms put together provided opportunities for lawyers to connect with industry peers on very focused and topical issues,” essentially allowing firm contacts to “play ‘match-maker’ in very interesting ways.” ([Jee Kim, Corporate Counsel, Salesforce](#)) And, of course, many large firms will host events for the explicit purpose of providing networking opportunities for their in-house contacts.

Using law firm contacts to find your next opportunity

It has become increasingly common for in-house counsel to accelerate their careers by finding external opportunities rather than waiting for internal promotion opportunities — the “go out to go up” trend. As just one example, in 2023, [over half of Fortune 500 CLOs were external hires versus internal promotions](#) are ready to search for their next career opportunity, well-connected law firms can help them find — and secure — their next role. And of course, assisting in placing in-house counsel is an excellent way to potentially expand a law firm’s business opportunities.

Finding the role

The most direct benefit for in-house counsel in letting their outside counsel know that they are open to new opportunities is that law firms can help them discover them. Law firms, through their members, clients, and professional contacts, have access to a broad and diverse pool of opportunities spanning industries and geographies — including confidential in-house searches sourced through referrals. (In some cases, a law firm may learn about an open role before the incumbent in-house lawyer is even aware!) Most of the in-house counsel we spoke to regularly receive unposted in-house opportunities from law firm contacts. Law firms can also assist with the job search by providing insights into industry trends and legal market demands.

Securing the role

Law firms can do more than identify career opportunities; they can also improve an in-house lawyer’s

odds of landing a role. Several in-house counsel we spoke to used law firm relationships to help secure at least one in-house opportunity, with one lawyer leveraging law firm contacts to secure their last three in-house roles!

One way law firms can help in-house counsel secure their next role is through a referral. Law firm lawyers often have wide professional networks, given their frequent engagement at professional events and with professional organizations (e.g., industry groups and bar associations); and their endorsements can carry significant weight in the hiring process.

Stephen (one of this article's authors, and one of [ACC's 2024 Top 10 30-Somethings](#)) was introduced to his current company through a mutual outside counsel contact. Implicit in that introduction was the law firm partner's confidence that Stephen would be successful in the role. Keep in mind that in-house counsel who actively engage with law firms, join external organizations or bar associations, attend legal events, draft articles or other publications, and participate in industry forums will enhance their visibility and increase the likelihood that outside counsel will think of and recommend them for in-house positions. Leveraging these relationships also positions in-house counsel as well-connected professionals within the legal community, facilitating a smoother transition to new roles.

Law firm partnerships can also prove useful during the interview process. Some law firms may have contacts who worked at a prospective employer and can provide insights into information that is not readily available about aspects of the company such as its company culture, internal workings, and key decision-makers. In a competitive interview process, these small actions can tip the scales and make the difference between getting the job and being the runner-up.

Succeeding in the role

Once a lawyer steps into their new role, this conversation comes full circle! All the benefits discussed in Parts I and II become applicable to the new in-house role. Additionally, more law firms are hiring former GCs and in-house counsel to help with client and business development. One benefit often offered is to help set up an in-house lawyer for success by setting them up with 30/60/90 day plans, a suite of materials relevant to the role, and “crash courses” on topics that are newly part of the in-house counsel's scope.

Connections are the currency of success



In the world of law, connections are not just a formality — they're the currency of success. Often, it's not just about knowing the law — it's about knowing the people who shape it. "You don't need to be a great lawyer to be a great in-house leader!" ([Mark Roellig, former GC of four Fortune 500 companies](#)) By leveraging the meaningful relationships with law firm colleagues effectively, in-house lawyers can succeed in their current role, build their external brand, and even secure their next in-house opportunity. "Though undoubtedly there are many, many lawyers, the profession feels a lot like New York — you think you won't run into people you know but it happens more than you think! If there are people you liked, trusted, admired, or just want to keep in contact with, don't hesitate to reach out. People always have time for a coffee!" (Devon Klein, Legal Counsel, Palantir Technologies)

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[Stephen Mar](#)



Chief Legal & Administrative Officer

Odeko

Stephen Mar is chief legal and administrative officer at Odeko, a late-stage private company that provides comprehensive operations solutions to thousands of coffee shops, cafés and other establishments. Mar oversees the company's legal, HR, comms, corporate development, corporate governance and risk functions. He also serves on the board of directors of the NYU Law Alumni Association and maintains an active practice consulting and advising companies (especially startups) and business and legal leaders.

Prior to Odeko, Mar was VP, global head of litigation and investigations at WeWork, the world's leading global flexible space provider, where he helped lead the company through a multi-year turnaround and a de-SPAC process culminating in WeWork's public listing in October 2021. Before that, Mar was a lawyer at Sullivan & Cromwell, where he represented multinational public companies in high-stakes litigation, investigations, and crises.

Recognized as a [2024 Top 10 30-Something](#), Mar is actively involved in various ACC initiatives.

Mar enjoys writing and speaking on a variety of legal and leadership topics. You can follow him on LinkedIn [here](#).

[Bree Thompson](#)



Counsel

Hearst

Bree Thompson is currently serving as counsel at Hearst, a leading global, diversified information, services and media company. In her role, she provides legal guidance and support on corporate matters, primarily related to Hearst's newspapers. Prior to joining Hearst, Thompson was the senior legal counsel at Odeko Inc., a company that provides comprehensive operations solutions to local coffee shops, cafés, bakeries and other establishments.

Thompson began her career as an associate at Debevoise & Plimpton LLP and subsequently, Fenwick & West LLP, where she focused primarily on M&A transactions. Thompson received her J.D. from Columbia Law School in 2017 and her B.A. from Yale College in 2013. She was admitted to the New York State Bar in 2018.



Partner

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Arian M. June is a litigation partner based in the firm's Washington, D.C. office and is a member of the White Collar & Regulatory Defense Group. Recognized as one of 25 Influential Black Women in Business by The Network Journal (2020) and by Benchmark Litigation and Chambers USA for her expertise in white collar criminal defense, June's practice focuses on government and internal investigations, securities enforcement defense, whistleblower response, sensitive investigations and crisis management. She has represented financial institutions, publicly traded companies, investment advisers and senior executives in complex regulatory matters, including allegations of securities fraud, insider trading, accounting and corporate disclosure issues, violations of the Bank Secrecy Act, cyber-intrusions and sales practices violations, including matters involving foreign exchange products and the distribution of life insurance products.

June advises clients on various facets of the Dodd-Frank Act, with particular emphasis in designing corporate policies and procedures to comply with the Dodd-Frank Whistleblower regulations, investigating corporate whistleblower reports and mitigating whistleblower-related risks. In addition to

her white collar practice, June also advises boards of corporations, educational institutions and other organizations in sensitive investigations, including board-directed independent inquiries of allegations involving sexual misconduct, racial intolerance and related matters. According to Chambers USA (2023), June is said to provide “extraordinarily strong client service and responsiveness” and is “very practical, with a calm demeanor.” She also receives praise for being “very strategic in her thinking” and “sharp” with an ability to “get down in the weeds while seeing around corners.” Arian M. June is a litigation partner based in the firm’s Washington, D.C. office and is a member of the White Collar & Regulatory Defense Group. Recognized as one of 25 Influential Black Women in Business by The Network Journal (2020) and by Benchmark Litigation and Chambers USA for her expertise in white collar criminal defense, June’s practice focuses on government and internal investigations, securities enforcement defense, whistleblower response, sensitive investigations and crisis management. She has represented financial institutions, publicly traded companies, investment advisers and senior executives in complex regulatory matters, including allegations of securities fraud, insider trading, accounting and corporate disclosure issues, violations of the Bank Secrecy Act, cyber-intrusions and sales practices violations, including matters involving foreign exchange products and the distribution of life insurance products.

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[Kim T. Le](#)



Counsel

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Kim T. Le is a corporate counsel and a member of the firm's Healthcare & Life Sciences Group. She is also active in the firm's Data Strategy & Security practice. Le works with industry stakeholders to solve compliance issues and navigate challenges presented by an ever-changing regulatory landscape. She structures cutting-edge vertical and horizontal alignments (e.g. population health management models, integrated health delivery systems and value-based risk-sharing arrangements) and handles sophisticated transactional matters, particularly in the digital health, managed care, and physician practice sectors. Her understanding of the transformative legal and policy issues affecting healthcare allows Le to identify risks, trouble-shoot obstacles and bring challenging projects to a successful conclusion.

Further, Le regularly advises companies on multijurisdictional business strategy and implementation matters; fraud and abuse laws, particularly those relating to physician self-referral (Stark Law), anti-kickback, and False Claims Act issues; corporate practice of medicine and physician fee-splitting prohibitions; and Medicare/Medicaid compliance, including Medicare Advantage marketing rules. As a leading practitioner on privacy, data security and cyber-security issues, Le provides expertise in data breach reporting, including covered entity and business associate obligations under the HIPAA breach notification rule and audit response. Further, Le counsels clients regarding privacy and security preparedness, routinely redesigning compliance programs for provider organizations, hybrid entities, service vendors and technology companies to improve operational effectiveness and decrease compliance risk. Le joined Debevoise in 2020.

Le received a J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center, Dean's List, in 2008, where she served as articles editor of the Journal of Gender and the Law. As a member of Georgetown's International Women's Rights Clinic, she co-authored a litigation brief, argued by the Leadership and Advocacy for Women in Africa Program before the Supreme Court of Ghana, opposing tribal violations of Ghanaian women's constitutional rights to equality. She received her M.Sc. in Biomedical Ethics and Health Law, with honors, from the University of Birmingham Wolfson Centre for Medical Education in 2005. She received her B.A. magna cum laude from the University of Maryland in 2003.

