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Day in the Life: Tony Ellis

Interviews and Profiles



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Name: Anthony P. Ellis

Title: VP, General Counsel & Corporate Secretary

Company: Long John Silver's, LLC

Location: Louisville, KY

5:45 am:



Tony Ellis and wife wearing fun costumes.

Wake up after snoozing the alarm twice. My wife and I agree it is probably my turn to head downstairs and make coffee. Best purchase we made this past year was a new coffee machine. It turns out you can put a price on happiness, and it is \$399 on Amazon. Down a protein shake while waiting for the coffee to finish. The dog is following me but there is a raging thunderstorm, and we all know how this is going to end, but I hold the door open for a minute anyway. She decides to hold it a bit longer.

6:00 am:

Join my wife in the sunroom with coffee for our morning catch-up. Both my wife and I work (she's the director of innovation at a large multi-national food franchisor in town), and due to our schedules and our daughter's social and activity calendar, we now spend the first 30 minutes of each day aligning on life. This morning, I discover it is school picture day and there is an outdoor field trip, both things that work well with the thunderstorm raging outside. As I'm suggesting it's unlikely they will do the field trip, school sends a message noting that the field trip is on and to make sure to send a raincoat. Check. I remind my wife that I have a work dinner tonight, and she decides she will take our daughter on a mommy-daughter date and get a present for an upcoming birthday party, something I thought I had to do Friday afternoon. I like how this morning is going.

6:30 am:

Wake our daughter. We have started using a new app called Thumsters to reward good behavior, and it has made a significant difference in all of our lives. She voluntarily gets dressed, cleans her room, feeds the dog, and eats breakfast to be able to earn a "Thumbs Up" on the app that she can put towards about ten different goals. Right now she is working toward a trip to an ice cream shop around the corner. While she does this, my wife and I knock out a quick morning yoga class. Back

pain is a real symptom of getting older, and morning yoga has kept it at bay for a while.

7:00 am:



Tony Ellis's daughter showing a big smile with Long John Silver's mascot.

We divide and conquer. I prepare my daughter's snack, ballet bag, and complete the permission slip for the field trip. My wife does our daughter's hair and straightens her uniform. We leave for morning drop off about 7:15.

7:35 am:

Return home and get dressed and ready for work. This is my third general counsel job and I love it. I've had the privilege of having a lot of different legal careers and experiences (Big Law corporate and litigation, PI work, bankruptcy, government, solo practitioner), and none of them were the traditional GC track, so it was not something that I considered. In good news, it turns out most of the legal skills involved in developing a private practice and advising clients are equally applicable in the general counsel's office so it has been an easy transition. I review my schedule for the day and check emails that came in since last evening, firing off quick responses where I can.

8:00 am:

Head into the office. We are an in-person flexible workplace, meaning that the expectation is that if you can be in the office you should be, but if there is a pressing matter you can work remotely (e.g., your kid is home sick, contractor is at the house, etc.). This has been a great fit for the company, which is in hyper-growth and turnaround mode following an ownership change in late 2022. Listen to [Wait Wait... Don't Tell Me](#) on the way into work.

8:20 am:

Arrive at work. Get a second cup of coffee and set up my time blocks for the day. In general, I try to time block out how my day will go, leaving thirty-minute gaps every few hours for random things that may pop up. I try to schedule any priority projects that require my focused attention from 9 to 11 AM. Nonetheless, as a GC, I have to be flexible when people pop in with issues.

8:50 am:

I turn to my first priority project. Last night our company president called to tell me that we are acquiring a group of stores from one of our franchisees and gave me the material terms, so I start working on an LOI and a purchase agreement. Our last deal was a complicated bankruptcy acquisition and workout, and this is likely going to be a much smoother process. Each time we prep a new LOI I run through the last few deals to see if there is anything we should add to our form. Add a few sentences on some deal points that arose in our most recent transaction concerning prorated payments and timing issues. Confer with our CFO and president on any final issues related to the LOI and circulate the draft for their review.

9:30 am:

Turn to my second priority project — editing a draft response to an EEOC charge that is due next week. We used to turn these over to insurance and our outside counsel, but I have experience in this area so we now draft the responses in-house and then have them reviewed by outside counsel for any major issues. This saves us a sizeable amount in legal fees each year (like many companies, we are focused on reducing legal spend), and it has two added benefits: I get more visibility into our HR processes and form better relationships with the field HR team, and it helps train my risk and litigation paralegal on compliance and human resource matters. During my review of the underlying HR documents it seems certain information is missing from the file so I contact HR to get the missing documents.

10:45 am:

My franchise paralegal, who manages our franchise administration, including renewals, transfers, terminations, etc., pops in to discuss a handful of pending items. She wanted to confirm some details regarding an ongoing transfer between current franchisees. We also discuss a larger project involving our implementation of a new franchise administration database. We wanted to test how long it would take to transition and verify information per store, and the initial numbers are higher than we expected. We need to do some additional tests, but it seems like I need to start adjusting my expectations and modify what I convey to the leadership team about the project timeframe.

11:00 am:

I spend thirty minutes reviewing and responding to emails. In general, I use a process I was introduced to at an earlier job where I put emails into three buckets: Respond now, this week, or next week. Next week is used as a hold for anything that is not urgent but important, and I try to go through those items on Fridays. There is a calendar invite to a food tasting. If you work for a food company, you eat a lot of food. This tasting sounds delicious, so I accept. I also receive and review a handful of daily legal digests and participate in a few list serves, including different ACC section digests. I skim these for anything relevant to what I am working on and try to respond to the questions if I have anything to share that has not already been said. Finally, there is a financial summary prepared by our CFO for our leadership team meeting tomorrow. We cycle through different departments each week for deeper dives at our leadership team meetings, and finance is up this week.

11:30 am:

Lunch. Most days I eat at my desk. Today is leftover turkey chili. During lunch, I go through the “This Week” email folder to see if there is anything that needs to be added to my calendar and handled today. Find an email from my real estate paralegal about a lease negotiation and provide my feedback on our counteroffer. Find an email from our marketing team to approve a new ad and the disclaimer language. This one looks fine and I approve.

12:00 pm:

TC with our COO, director of operations, and food safety audit lead concerning our new agreement with a third-party to conduct our food safety and restaurant standard inspections. Advise them as to their rights and obligations under our franchise agreement and the vendor contract, and they craft a strategy moving forward based on the legal and contract requirements.

12:30 pm:

Follow up with our director of digital marketing concerning the legal issues surrounding an upcoming sweepstakes. There are a number of state specific laws and timing requirements surrounding these types of programs. We align on the needs and he starts pulling together the missing information.

12:45 pm:

Review real estate lease for a new location where the landlord is a large REIT. We already have a longstanding relationship with this landlord and this seems to be the same form we have recently used for a different property, but the paralegal that forwarded us the paperwork is not one I recognize. Even where you regularly work with another party, it is always important to run your own comparison to ensure that they started with the correct form and your specific terms are included. Here. The lease is missing language that we regularly use with this landlord concerning our assignment rights, and I respond to the landlord’s counsel with the recent lease that includes the agreed-upon language, which usually quickly resolves these types of issues. In that same email, I request that they follow up on a separate lease transfer that we want to close next week but still need their approval.

1:15 pm:

My second block of highly focused time is usually 1 PM to 3PM. One of my goals was to implement a more robust risk management program by the end of Q3, and the past few months have been spent developing the program parameters with leadership and speaking with other GCs about their own programs. I highly recommend to any corporate counsel that they start any new initiative by talking with their peers first to see how they address the issue. We don't bill by the hour and there is rarely a reason to reinvent the wheel. One of our peers in town supplied us with their form documents built over two decades of development of their program, and those forms are now the backbone of our own program. The first step of the program was a risk assessment survey that was sent out a few weeks ago, and now we are meeting with the department heads to go over their responses.

Today's meeting is with finance and its relatively short as we have pretty robust internal controls and no public disclosure requirements. Tomorrow is IT, and it will likely be one of our longest because we will have to cover cybersecurity, data privacy, AI, payment processing, and other substantial issues that fall within their oversight.

1:45 pm:

Meeting ends, and I have fifteen minutes before my next scheduled project. Walk the halls and pop in to say hello to our HR leader. I try to walk the halls every day as it's a way to gather information and identify potential issues before they happen. Most people are unaware of the number of legal compliance requirements involved (e.g., the sweepstakes issue I handled earlier in the day). Moreover, walking the halls gives people a chance to call me in for a quick chat about something that they may not want to "go to legal" to discuss. This meeting is an example of why it's helpful to walk the halls because I learn that the HR field team is planning to come to the office later this week so we discuss ways to collaborate on some sessions with team.



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KEYNOTE ANNOUNCED!

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2:00 pm:

Respond to an email from one of our international franchise law firms about a registration issue in her country. We have had significant international expansion and growth in the past three years, and in my first six months we negotiated new multi-unit development agreements for Malaysia and Thailand and navigated their respective franchise registration frameworks. I had blocked twenty minutes for this project and I finished it at 2:18.

2:18 pm:

Spend a few minutes catching up on a group text thread about an upcoming dinner party. A few years ago a group of us started a quarterly dining club that now has about 50 people. The next dinner is coming up (this is our 11th). Turns out one of the people in the group lived in Poland (interestingly, their family was close with Pope John Paul II) so they are cooking a Polish feast based on the dishes he would eat when he came over. Most of the discussion is about finalizing the menu before it goes to print. The dinners happen on Thursday, and I confirm that I cleared my calendar for that Friday morning. Sidebar: There is a massive study on happiness out of Harvard that has been going on for decades. After all the variables were evaluated, it turns out the single biggest indicator of happiness is the quality of the friends and relationships with whom you surround yourself. This job can be overwhelming and there is always something to do, but I always make it a priority to spend time with my friends and family. Sometimes that means blocking time off on the calendar on a workday.

2:20 pm:

Review an email from our IP counsel regarding a response we received from the USPTO examiner concerning a recently filed trademark application. Agree with their recommendation for two items and ask for more information about the third.

2:40 pm:

Review a contract sent by our HR team about an employee benefit perk that they are seeking to implement. It is a free service and easily cancellable, but does appear that it would collect a significant amount of employee data so I focus on the sections concerning data ownership and privacy, among other standard terms like limitations of liability, choice of law, assignment, etc.

3:00 pm:

Receive a call from our president to update me on the LOI and store acquisition. We have a 1:1 scheduled for the next day but we go over most of the issues we were going to discuss on the call and decide to cancel the 1:1.

3:30 pm:

Receive the updated documentation from HR about the EEOC matter. Spend thirty minutes reviewing and finalizing the position statement and send to outside insurance counsel for their sign off.

4:00 pm:

Review and respond to emails. Review my checklist of things I wanted to accomplish today and see what is missing. Text my wife to check in on her day.

4:30 pm:

Receive an email from our insurer about an upcoming meeting to go over our insurance renewals and claim history this past year. Review the claim history file and send a few emails about some larger claims to our insurance paralegal.

5:00 pm:

Receive an email with my department's monthly legal budget and actual spend, which is what I expected to be.

5:30 pm:

Leave the office and head to a restaurant to join our president, COO and VP of development for a work dinner with a new franchisee group that has just acquired a number of stores and is seeking to enter into a development agreement for a much larger number. Dinner and drinks are lively. They have a long history with the brand and are engaged and excited by our recent changes, which led them to make their recent acquisition. They are interested in expanding internationally due to some family connections.

8:00 pm:

Arrive home in time for bedtime. My wife and I usually split the bedtime routine with our daughter. Lately, it involves fairly competitive games of Sorry!, which she received for her recent birthday. Once her teeth are brushed, we read a story and sing her bedtime song.

9:00 pm:

Head to the family room to meet my wife and recap about our day. Check my emails and there is nothing pressing that came in during dinner. One email notes that my daughter's soccer practice, which was scheduled for tomorrow evening, is cancelled because the fields are soaked (I was voluntold to coach my daughter's kindergarten soccer team, but it is actually a ton of fun). I send a text to the parent group text letting them know that the practice is cancelled and there is a good chance the game will be cancelled this weekend too since there are more thunderstorms forecast for Saturday.





Tony Ellis and family posing for group selfies.

9:30 pm:

I put on a murder mystery while my wife falls asleep on the sofa. We both really like old British murder mysteries like Midsommer Murders and Inspector Lewis. Tonight we are watching Brokenwood Mysteries, a New Zealand-based show.

9:45 pm:

I receive a text from my neighbor about having a quick bourbon since the weather is now very comfortable, and we agree to catch up and put the Phils game on outside (I'm from Philly). I'm more of a night owl whereas my wife is asleep usually by 9:30. We share a bourbon and catch up on current events and things that are happening around the neighborhood.

10:45 pm:

Neighbor leaves and I head up to bed to read for a bit. Our entire leadership team is currently reading “Unreasonable Hospitality” by one of the guys who ran Eleven Madison Park in its glory days. I’m about halfway through the book. Think about the last time we were in NYC for a vacation and book a dinner date for my wife and I for this coming weekend. Reach out to our babysitters to see who is available.

11:45 pm:

Fall asleep.

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[Anthony P. Ellis](#)



VP, General Counsel & Corporate Secretary

Long John Silver's LLC

Anthony P. Ellis is the Vice President and general counsel at Long John Silver's, LLC headquartered in Louisville, KY. He graduated with a B.A. in International Economics from the Catholic University of America, and received his juris doctor from The George Washington University School of Law. After starting his career as a biglaw associate in New York City, he relocated to Louisville, KY to purchase a small business, became one of the lead lawyers in Kentucky's case against Purdue Pharma et al for their role in creating the opioid crisis, ran Kentucky's innovation and entrepreneurial support ecosystem, and ultimately found his way to a career as a general counsel. He began in that role as the general counsel for the Kentucky Cabinet for Economic Development, and also previously worked as a general counsel for V-Soft Consulting, LLC, one of the country's largest technology and IT staffing firms. Ellis is deeply engaged in the Kentucky community, serving on a variety of non-profit boards, coaching junior soccer, and running a private dining and travel club he co-founded in 2022.