



In the Boat with Your Business Peers: A Conversation with E Lysonge of NerdWallet

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E Lysonge

Chief Legal Officer and Corporate Secretary
Nerdwallet

For many in-house counsel — and especially for those aspiring to the general counsel role — the key to success is learning how to sit *in the boat* with the business. As E Lysonge, Chief Legal Officer at NerdWallet, describes it, this means rowing alongside your business peers, understanding the waters ahead, and helping to steer toward safe passage.

Equally important is cultivating kindness as a leadership trait. For Lysonge, emotional intelligence and interpersonal awareness are not simply soft skills, but essential ones — avenues for building trust with business colleagues and fostering stronger collaboration. Combined with legal's unique ability to “connect the dots” across regulatory, compliance, and operational landscapes, these attributes define what it means to be a modern CLO.

In a wide-ranging interview, Lysonge shared some of his insights for in-house counsel:

- **Embed lawyers with the business.** Being “in the boat” means legal is seen as part of the business team, not just a support function.
- **Kindness matters.** Building stronger relationships with colleagues starts with empathy and emotional intelligence.
- **Use your network.** ACC membership provides a ready-made community of peers who have faced similar challenges and can share solutions.

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- **Lead by lifting others.** A CLO's legacy is measured not only by their own success, but by how many others they've mentored into leadership.

For ACC members looking to strengthen their own leadership and business acumen, ACC's [Essential Toolkit for New General Counsel](#) offers practical resources, including a checklist on how to **Develop Leadership and Business Skills**. Read the full interview with Lysonge below, lightly edited for clarity.

[Build your skill set with **Business Education for In-house Counsel** from ACC and the Boston University Questrom School of Business. **Register today!**](#)

Q&A with E Lysonge, CLO of NerdWallet

ACC:

You recently brought your entire legal team together for an all-staff retreat. What inspired that initiative, and what outcomes did you see?

Lysonge:

We've been doing our annual offsite for the last four years. NerdWallet is a remote-first company, so opportunities to meet in person are rare. Once a year I like to get my legal team together. We've rebranded the team as Trust and Safety to reflect that we also have information security professionals in our legal and compliance family.

At the retreat, we focused on regulatory matters across insurance, lending, investment management, and consumer finance. We also discussed the TCPA, shifts in M&A and corporate venture capital, and trends in marketing. I try to balance substantive legal issues with real business challenges, so the team can partner effectively with our business colleagues.

ACC:

That business orientation is something we hear from many CLOs. How do you instill that mindset in your Trust and Safety group?

Lysonge:

I've refined my approach over 24 years of practice. At NerdWallet, I try to embed lawyers directly in the business. I call it being in the boat with your business peers — you're rowing in the same

direction, and you see where the waves may come so you can avoid disastrous outcomes.

By embedding lawyers, they're seen as part of the business team, not just legal support. That way, they're brought in early rather than at the 11th hour. We've had success with this approach, and I believe it's a blueprint for legal departments anywhere.

ACC:

Back to the retreat: How did you balance relationship building with strategy and business discussions?

Lysonge:

We usually begin with a soft-skills, EQ-based exercise to break the ice. This year the focus was on kindness — how kindness can help build stronger relationships with colleagues.

We also dedicate half a day to a team-building outing. This year we went to Topgolf, which was more athletic than past activities. It gave us a chance to relax, share what's happening in our lives, and connect as people. In past years, we've done everything from chartering a boat to solving a murder mystery.

ACC:

How do you carry that momentum from the retreat into day-to-day operations?

Lysonge:

We conduct a leadership-level retro debrief to capture the most important takeaways. Our legal operations team then helps turn those insights into initiatives and tracks them through the rest of the year. Legal ops is critical to making sure lessons from the retreat are operationalized, not just forgotten.

ACC:

You've been engaged with ACC for quite some time. How has that shaped your journey as a legal leader?

Lysonge:

ACC introduced me to the broader in-house community. Around 2012, I helped launch the Kentucky chapter — which I'm proud to say is still going strong. That experience gave me lasting friendships and a national network I can call on for advice.

ACC has been invaluable in giving me a circle of peers who understand the challenges CLOs face.

ACC:

What advice would you offer a new GC or CLO?

Lysonge:

Don't silo yourself or try to solve problems in a vacuum. Someone, somewhere has faced the same issue before. Instead of reinventing the wheel, leverage your network.

Leaders need humility: you don't have to be the smartest person in the room. Use your peers' experiences to find solutions more efficiently. That's the greatest value of ACC membership — we're stronger together than alone.

ACC:

On a personal level, what keeps you motivated?

Lysonge:

At this stage of my career, I take pride in helping others advance. Many on my team aspire to be GCs or CLOs, and I find fulfillment in mentoring and supporting them. Leaders are often judged more by the people they've helped succeed than by their own achievements.

ACC:

Anything else you'd like to share with ACC members?

Lysonge:

Legal operations is an essential function. Analytics and data are vital for CLOs to be effective, and legal ops helps capture and analyze that information. ACC has done a fantastic job highlighting the importance of legal ops, and I encourage departments without it to build the function.

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