

*“How does a general counsel ensure that he or she receives the first call?”*



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FOR COMPANIES LARGE OR SMALL, it's terribly important that a general counsel's clients feel comfortable calling him or her at the first sign of trouble. It's bad for the client, the company, its shareholders, and certainly the general counsel when the lawyer is the last to know. How do you make sure that you get that first call?

Clients take for granted that the general counsel is a good lawyer. While not being able to answer every question under the sun, the general counsel can answer many and can efficiently locate a lawyer in the department or in a law firm to answer those on which further insight is needed.

But being a good lawyer is not enough. It's also crucial to be intimately familiar with the financial and operational sides of the business. Clients should not have to feel the need to educate me on the basics of the business every time they give me a ring. In my own case, my prior life as a C.P.A. has been helpful in earning credibility with the company's financial, business development and accounting personnel. At the same time, I strive constantly to learn more about the company's operations as well. Other general counsels bring their own career experiences to bear in the effort. The point is simple: Make it your business to learn the company's business.

The general counsel is, or at least ought to be, a member of the senior management team. But true membership on that team must be earned. Legal acumen may be what got us in the door. But to add value, our knowledge must transcend the law and embrace the same business concerns with which our clients wrestle daily.

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 must transcend  
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