

“Is there an integrative role for the general counsel inside the corporate enterprise?”

“To connect the dots.”

THE ANSWER IS A RESOUNDING YES. ONE OF THE defining attributes of the general counsel function within a complex business enterprise is facilitating an integrated, company-wide view of key issues. This role — which includes but extends beyond legal expertise — calls upon the general counsel to be highly communicative and highly receptive as well.

At Rainier Investment Management, an employee-owned investment firm, our dynamic expansion and development of new product channels in an evolving regulatory environment raise legal questions which appear to be discrete. To answer those legal questions, however, counsel must reach out to various business teams to understand the extended impact of the new initiative or regulation within the business and upon its external relationships. Armed with that information, counsel must then function as a mediator, balancing the impacts and insuring the resolution of cross-functional challenges and goals. By undertaking this effort, the general counsel ends up being equipped with a comprehensive view of the business.

Within a company, executives tasked with focused business missions often require a perspective that encompasses all potential implications of a proposed action. The general counsel, while expected to have or to retain the appropriate legal expertise, is sometimes uniquely positioned to “connect the dots.” In this respect, the general counsel can contribute enormously to the enterprise by developing an understanding of the issues of the day that synthesizes the many disparate considerations.

Clients value perspective. And it is perspective, along with legal expertise, that the general counsel can contribute.



Kristen L. Howell
General Counsel,
Rainier Investment Management, Inc.
Seattle, Washington

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