

CORPORATE COUNSEL

An **ALM** Website

corp.counsel.com | February 9, 2018

Tips on Transforming a Legal Career From Inside-Out

While the legal industry has undergone dramatic shifts and changes in recent times, it is still not a very common occurrence to find a long-time inside counsel making the leap into the world of outside law firms.

Steven P. Seltzer

While the legal industry has undergone dramatic shifts and changes in recent times, it is still not a very common occurrence to find a long-time inside counsel making the leap into the world of outside law firms. Changing career directions is never an overnight process and always involves a fair amount of soul searching. It goes without saying that corporate attorneys can often develop a very strict and limiting view of a career path that can prove to be particularly resistant to change.

If there is a growing commitment to making a change, the best first initial step is to talk to friends and trusted colleagues in the legal field. Even more distant acquaintances in the field can be a good sounding board. Their



objective views and encouragement can be a springboard to self-reflection and even rediscovery. We are all guilty of taking for granted the person we see in the mirror every morning and it can be invaluable to have another set of eyes offering a different perspective.

In-house lawyers can offer an outside law firm so much more

than just a book of business. The approach to client satisfaction and deep knowledge about the ways in which corporate culture works can prove extremely valuable to firms who are always striving to achieve higher standards of client satisfaction. The former in-house lawyer can be a key ambassador offering thoughts and insights on the

expectations from the client-side and the internal pressures and issues that clients might be managing. Within a law firm, sharing best practices about billing and legal operations management is also a great benefit to the firm.

If an attorney is truly committed to turning a legal career “inside-out,” here are some key tips to consider:

- **Find the right outside match:** Just like with corporations, not all outside law firms are alike. Carefully research the culture and histories of each firm and determine which might present the best fit. A law firm must be forward-thinking to appreciate the many values that an experienced in-house counsel will bring.

- **Tap into an entrepreneurial spirit:** Inside attorneys might not have a book of business that they can bring, but there are so many other experiences, contacts and professional perspectives they can effectively harness to quickly develop these opportunities.

- **Understand the new office dynamics:** Not all authority and direction flows down from one general counsel in a

law firm. Rather, several different partners in the firm hold distinctive decision-making authorities and responsibilities.

- **Be open and accessible:** Corporate culture may have the tendency to become hierarchal and rigid, but outside law firms often value being nimble and flexible. Reach out to co-workers and actively offer assistance and insights on a variety of client issues.

- **Be the ambassador:** Attorneys who have been inside counsel need to understand how valuable and unique these perspectives can be to a law firm. Help partners stay one step ahead of any client challenges by sharing a steady perspective and offering analysis of what the client might need and the possible motivations behind specific requests and demands. Maintain a commitment to spreading the word on client-centric best practices and offering unique advice on achieving these goals.

Change is never easy and it can be quite difficult for a corporate counsel, who is locked into a highly defined daily schedule and routine, to take a second look at the legal profession and its many other

opportunities. While attorneys generally have a reputation for being risk-averse, making a bold change and taking a professional risk can actually be extremely rewarding and could ultimately enrich a career in many ways that might not have been expected. Sometimes what seems like a reinvention can actually prove to be a rediscovery that leads to a sense of renewed professional fulfillment.

Steven P. Seltzer was a senior in-house litigation attorney at MetLife and, after a successful 25-year tenure, took the leap into the world of private law firms and joined Moritt Hock & Hamroff in Garden City, New York.