

MoFo Explains How To Be A Successful General Counsel

By **Kevin Penton**

Law360 (March 10, 2021, 3:53 PM EST) -- General counsel looking to be successful should seek to exhibit humility, empathy and respect for the personal circumstances of those they work with, according to a study released on Wednesday by Morrison & Foerster LLP.

Those wishing to be successful in the position should seek to not only provide their company with impeccable legal counsel on technical and transactional matters, but to also keep their employer's big picture in mind, according to the study, "Leading With Influence."

Through interviews with more than 30 global general counsel and a survey of nearly 120 global senior executives, Morrison & Foerster found that general counsel should strive to adapt their leadership strategies and traits with an eye to influence a broad range of stakeholders, according to the study, which includes an interactive component.

Like a company's CEO, general counsel from their positions are able to see how their employer fits within a system of employees, customers, stakeholders, the particular industry and the company's community, former Hershey's general counsel Damien Atkins told Morrison & Foerster.

"The unique GC is the one who can combine that functional requirement with the innate ability to say, 'OK, where is the opportunity here?'" Atkins said. "They can look through the eyes of the CEO and say, 'How can we reframe what success looks like?'"

Particular areas that general counsels should seek to improve to ensure they are "future-fit" include being adept at handling change, successfully providing direction to others, being smart on an interpersonal level with those they interact with and working well with others and under pressure, according to the study.

"'Leading with Influence' allows general counsel to assess and benchmark their current behavior, cultivate leadership skills and apply best practices to increase their influence within their organizations and beyond the legal department," Tessa Schwartz, the firm's managing partner, said in a statement on Wednesday.

General counsel should increasingly see themselves as not simply being the person who protects their company from risk, but as the "change-maker ... who can redefine the direction of an organization," according to the study.

"Against the backdrop of an ongoing pandemic, leadership matters now more than ever," Schwartz said. "Legal leaders can significantly increase their influence within their organizations and improve engagement within their teams and C-suite executives by adopting a flexible approach to engaging with various stakeholders."

--Editing by Nicole Bleier.