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General Counsel Across the Globe Are Knocking on the C-Suite Door, Study Finds

By *Phillip Bantz*

For most general counsel and other in-house leaders throughout the world, the C-suite is the place to be, according to a first of its kind study from ALM's Global Leaders in Law and Morrison & Foerster.

Of the 200 senior corporate counsel in the U.S., Asia and Europe who participated in **The GC {Re}defined**, study released today, 81 percent believed it was fundamental for them to have a seat at the C-suite table. And nearly 40 percent of GCs believed their next career move would be stepping up to serve as CEO.



Brad Wine

"Because that seems to be the natural evolution of where the GC role is heading, a lot of GCs have picked up that cue and said it makes logical sense to lead an entire organization," said Bradley Wine, global co-chair of **Morrison Foerster's**



(Courtesy photo)

litigation department in Washington, D.C.

He added, "A lot of GCs are being asked in the era of #MeToo to opine on and advise their company on what is legal but also what is right. They have a responsibility that goes across functions ... and touches so many different elements of a business."

But, while many GCs apparently have C-suite aspirations, it seems that many of them aren't particularly concerned about bolstering their executive leadership skills, such as stakeholder management and team-building. Instead,

they appear to be focused on the familiar—most listed legal skills, problem-solving and judgment as their top priorities for developing their leadership strengths.

"The study highlights a gap in perception between securing those types of opportunities and roles and what GCs need to be doing to focus on their professional development," Wine said. "A lot of GCs retreat back to the more traditional legal skill set, as opposed to looking at the other interpersonal and emotional intelligence types of skills required for C-suite leaders."

After they've gained entry to the C-suite, 48 percent of GCs said they expected to influence executive decisions on data security issues, while 15 percent of respondents listed ethics and compliance and 11 percent cited litigation as areas in which they wanted to have sway.



Bill Deckelman

Bill Deckelman, executive vice president, general counsel and secretary of DXC Technology, a global information technology

services company headquartered in Tysons, Virginia, said he's included in most executive management meetings.

"That's where all the discussions go on that you need to be aware of. I'm fortunate in that regard," said Deckelman, who added he focuses on "bringing business value to the C-suite."

But unlike 38 percent of the survey participants, Deckelman asserted that he and the majority of the other GCs in his circle don't have their sights set on the CEO chair.

"That's not really on my career path," he said. "Most GCs I talk

to, that's not really the goal. The GC is not out talking to investors, running earnings calls, that sort of thing."

The study also looked at how GCs use technology and found that, on a global basis, an average of 60 percent of respondents collaborated with their company's IT department to build tech tools to make life easier in the legal department. In the U.S., only 53 percent of respondents worked with their in-house tech gurus, compared with 62 percent in Europe and 68 percent in Asia.

Deckelman, whose company uses an outside provider for legal and contracting services, noted that developing contract management, artificial intelligence and other tech systems in-house is an expensive proposition and a tough sell to make to the company's execs.

"And the IT department, they've usually got their hands full dealing with HR systems and financial systems and email—all the things that run the company generally," he added. "It's hard for legal to show up on their front door and get their attention."

Other findings from the report include:

- So-called urgency bias (e.g., feeling pressure to extinguish daily fires rather than being able to step back and focus on long-term strategies) is more of a problem for GCs in Asia and Europe, where 80 percent and 74 percent of respondents, respectively, said they experienced the issue. Only 46 percent of the U.S.-based GCs said it was a problem.

- Legal departments could be shrinking as tech advances: 34 percent of respondents said they'd already begun replacing or anticipated replacing in-house staff with tech solutions within the next five years.

- When it comes to hiring outside counsel, price remains the top consideration. But 45 percent of GCs said they wanted their lawyers to share in the risk and have a stake in the outcome of a legal matter, typically through the way in which they're compensated. And 30 percent of the respondents cited commitments to diversity and responsibility values and initiatives as key drivers in the selection of outside counsel.

Phillip Bantz is a reporter for *Corporate Counsel*. Follow him on Twitter @PhillipBantz