

# My View From the Inside

BY JOHN C. GREGORY JR.

**C**ome on in. The water's fine. No, this is not a continuation of the metaphoric cycling diary of my predecessor, Steve Sher, but rather a perspective on the practice of law on the "inside"—inside counsel, that is.

Or perhaps you know us as "corporate counsel," "chief counsel," "legal director" or the increasingly popular "CLO."

But, alas, this is about more than titles. It certainly is about more than money and prestige. After all, it's no secret that, on the average, the income of a partner in a mid- to large-size law firm can be substantially greater than that of the equivalent inside person. Rather, to my mind, it is about quality of life issues.

For those of you who have bothered to ask someone on the inside about their job, everything you have ever heard about practice on the inside is probably true. It can be less harried, have quantifiable impact on the "client" and is often personally rewarding. Many days the hours are 9 to 5. Most weekends are free. One takes the job home less often. The word "humane" comes to mind as compared to life on the "outside" where the almighty billable hour and the frequently difficult and political swim upstream toward partnership control nearly every aspect of one's life. The yield of all of this is an enhanced quality of life and more time with family and friends, pursuing activities both pleasant and healthy. The bottom line in my experience is that the job is a part of your life, but it does not consume your entire life.

At the same time, it does not mean that life on the inside is any less professionally rewarding. You still must practice your craft with no less a comprehension of the applicable law and a skill set that, by definition, is more business-centric and less theoretical. You must quickly get beyond treatise law to offer frank, practical advice that can be both easily understood and implemented.

It is important to note that my experience on the inside may not be representative of all corporate counsel. I work for a small manufacturing company that makes quality, high-performance lanterns and flashlights and headlamps for the law enforcement, firefighting, sporting goods and industrial markets. I am not part of a huge law department servicing a megalithic multinational. Heck, I AM the legal department! I am the department manager, support staff and



Jeff Lyons

chief legal counsel all rolled into one. Moreover, I was the first in-house lawyer hired as the company's growth merited such. What better opportunity to take all that my growing number of years at the bar has taught me in order to create practical and functional systems to professionally service my corporate client?

That said, while generalities might not apply to all inside positions, there is one feature or characteristic that probably does. Being on the inside is about more than individual achievement. One must check his or her ego at the door. Instead, it is for team players who are willing and able to play on a multi-disciplinary team that spans the entire corporate infrastructure from Executive Management to Human Resources to Engineering and beyond. On the inside, you quickly learn to work in an environment that requires you to wear many hats and speak many languages in order to successfully integrate programs and solutions across the entire corporate strata.

You cannot hide behind a closed door or not return a phone call promptly. One minute the public relations director has a question about trademarks in advertising and the next minute your IT director is asking about

electronic document management. Tomorrow the operations manager will have questions about homeland security rules relative to the company's shipping practices at the same time the international sales representative wants confirmation of the company's compliance with new European Community environmental regulations. You are but a cog in the corporate machine. An important resource, albeit, but one of many contributing to make the greater whole a successful venture.

Nevertheless, on the inside you cannot and must not isolate yourself from the resources and tools that will enable you to offer the best advice to your client. Most important among these resources is your use of outside counsel. The successful inside lawyer learns how and when to turn to outside counsel. Toward this end, you must be able to spot an abundance of issues and concisely articulate same in a manner that will focus outside counsel.

In many ways, this is as much a management or administrative task as a legal one. Among the vital tasks is the ability to identify and choose the outside lawyer or law firm appropriate to the matter at hand as well as using what must be an innate ability to translate their legalese into plain English so that your CEO or other business manager can understand.

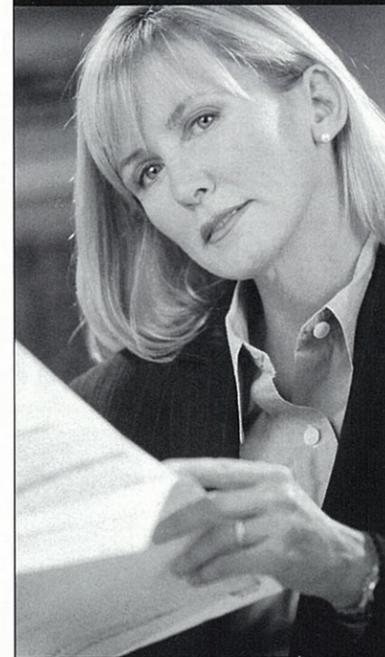
You'd be surprised how much this view from the inside can teach

you about "good lawyering" and various perceptions of "good lawyering" from the client side, which can only be known by an insider. I could fill a book with stories, ideas and suggestions to help improve outside counsel's ability to gain and keep corporate clients, but that is for another day...

I've been a member of *The Philadelphia Lawyer* Editorial Board for many years—long enough to have been a part of its predecessor, *The Shingle*, and long enough to have been on the "outside" when I first joined. To the best of my recollection, I am not aware of any other inside counsel who has held the position of Editor-in-Chief with the magazine. We have been fortunate to have the view from several other important disciplines, including solicitors, law professors, public defenders, sole practitioners and, of course, law firm partners. It pleases me that my tenure will present a worthy view from yet another side of our wonderful profession—the "in" side. ■

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