

# So You Want to be a GC: YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

We had an overwhelming response to our recent GC ready webinar, but unfortunately, we were unable to get to all of your wonderful questions before the end of our hour. We have answered the most popular questions below. We hope this information will better position and prepare you for getting a GC role.

**Q: I want to move to a global organization as a legal partner. I am looking to work with an organization this time around which resonates my values of diversity and inclusion and cares about the climate. What steps do you recommend achieving this goal?**

**A:** Many larger companies publish their statements of commitment to diversity and inclusion as well as the climate on their websites (if not, you can do an online search). To see that commitment in action, it should be reflected in their management team as well as the board. For publicly traded companies, it's easy to find out who the key players are in a company. For privately held companies, LinkedIn searches can be helpful in finding those in management and ascertaining whether their diversity and inclusion practices are truly reflected in the composition of the leadership team.

**Q: I lead M&A transactions and material commercial contract negotiations. What are the broader legal substantive skills I would need to acquire to be considered for a GC role? (I am senior and think I have the communication, networking and softer skills.)**

**A:** GC roles generally prefer generalist skills that include commercial transactions and M&A, but also corporate and securities, as well as regulatory and compliance, employment, litigation, IP, budget and people management, board experience, etc. For private company GC roles, the securities experience is less important (unless they are aiming for an IPO) and commercial transactions and other skill sets tend to be more emphasized. For public companies, the corporate and securities experience is generally required, and many public company GCs were trained as corporate and securities associates at big firms.

**Q: How do you best test for the culture and decision-making effectiveness of the executive team during the interview process?**

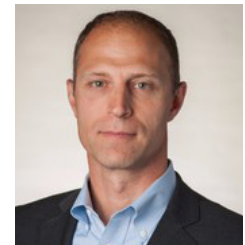
**A:** Pay attention to the way you are received and treated during the interview process, from your initial interaction with HR and administrative staff, to your meeting with the ultimate decision-maker. A job interview is a two-way street, so don't be afraid to ask questions to help you gauge whether the company is the right cultural fit. Know what matters to you and form your questions around those particular values.



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**Q: With regard to acquiring the diverse technical skills required for a GC, what is your advice on those who cannot get it all in the same role or company? Trying to understand the balance between staying versus going, how to pivot, etc.**

**A:** Not every GC in waiting will have all the technical skills desired for a GC job (and they do vary by size of company as well as industry), but getting additional skills often require a promotion within the same company, a move to a different group within the same company or a move to another company. If a promotion does not seem to be in the cards, it may be time to consider a move, ideally to a higher role rather than a lateral move. However, note that the legal industry is still relatively conservative in terms of too many moves. Make sure you have been in a company long enough to understand the business, make an impact, and realize that you don't have a path forward, before you consider leaving.

**Q: What if you have a lot of broad experience from a technical perspective, but no people management experience? It seems like managing lawyers is a requirement even if you have project management experience.**

**A:** Experience managing a team of lawyers, however small, is one of the most important components of a GC role. Some first counsel roles at small companies may not manage any lawyers to start, but typically companies like to hire lawyers with management experience so that they are able to scale and grow the legal team as the company grows. Getting yourself promoted into a management role or moving to another company where the new role has direct reports is probably the next step.

**Q: If rising to the GC seat in your current company isn't a viable option, do you have any tips for applying for a first-time GC role coming from a commercial in-house career? How can one demonstrate to a company that you're ready?**

**A:** Commercial attorneys can transition very effectively to a GC role, typically in smaller, private companies. The most successful transitions happen when the commercial attorney demonstrates that they have moved up the ladder within an organization, have scaled and managed a team, and have worked closely with executive teams and business leaders. Besides strong commercial transactions skills, you should ideally have touched upon areas such as corporate, employment, IP, product, compliance, etc. A generalist background is preferred over a specialized one.

**Q: In most organizations, the sitting GC will manage the interactions with the board. In that regard, those aspiring to be GC (such as a deputy GC or similar role) will have limited opportunities for board engagement. In your experience, how important is board exposure and do you have recommendations on way to get the exposure?**

**A:** Obtaining board exposure is exceptionally important for aspiring GCs. Speak with your manager and make sure they know that you are looking to grow in this area. Getting promoted to a deputy or an assistant secretary role will get you closer to the board, but if that is not an option at your current organization, consider asking to be present for purposes of note taking and minute drafting. Additionally, when you evaluate your career growth opportunities, consider whether taking a role with another organization would add the board piece to your portfolio of responsibilities.

**Q: For those attorneys who went in-house right out of law school (with no law firm training): Besides on-site training, what resources or other means do you recommend those attorneys should leverage in order to solidify their skill sets?**

**A:** There are many professional continuing legal education programs (PLI, ACC, etc.) out there that you can take advantage of to solidify skills in areas you are not as skilled in or are new to you. Leverage your own colleagues and superiors to get exposure to other areas outside of your practice. Don't be afraid to ask – most people will happily share their expertise.

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## YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

**Q: During annual performance reviews when career goals are discussed, do you recommend clearly (with tact) communicating that your career goal is to become GC and then continuously (at appropriate times) recommunicating that to position yourself for opportunities and understand how you are viewed within the organization?**

**A:** Most companies take GC succession seriously and they invest in identifying and developing internal talent for the succession bench. As with other aspects of your career, be proactive and strategic – make sure that senior leadership knows that your career goal is to become GC. Start having those conversations at an appropriate time and build from there. Having those conversations will enable you to position yourself for growth within your current organization and start evaluating other opportunities if there is no clear path forward at your current organization.

**Q: As a diverse attorney, how do we make sure we continue to be “seen” and “heard” in meetings and outside of meetings to be considered for a GC role, especially when we may not play “golf” on the weekend or be part of a country club (using a bad stereotype).**

**A:** It is important to build effective relationships throughout the organization and, most importantly, with members of the executive team if you have the opportunity to do so. Be proactive and strategic when it comes to relationship building – don’t wait to get invited or introduced; instead, reach out and introduce yourself. Make sure that people throughout the organization know who you are. Be an active participant in meetings of consequence that occur within the company. Get outside your comfort zone and ask to take on high visibility projects.

**Q: How do you improve your drafting skills in-house?**

**A:** Take on more commercial contracts (which are the bread and butter of most in-house legal departments) as well as projects that focus on company policies and template writing. There’s plenty of drafting to be done in-house and many overwhelmed commercial colleagues would be happy to have the help.