

# THE CHANGING FACE OF A LEGAL COUNSEL

*by Chris Potter - Managing Director - Singapore, Aquis Search*

The role of a Legal Counsel within any organisation has morphed considerably over the years. Gone are the days when it was considered acceptable working practice to be labouring away behind a closed door corresponding to the wider business only via email or internal memo.

General requirements in terms of top tier schooling, first class academics and reputable training contracts are still prerequisites for most in-house Counsel roles. However, to get a seat at the table in today's world, you have to offer so much more.

According to the Law Society, in 2017 there were 5,191 legal practitioners in Singapore, which represents a 15% increase in lawyers over the past 4 years. The competition is fierce and the expectation is increasing with every hire.

## **What is expected from a Legal Counsel?**

To get a "seat at the table" lawyers are involved in strategic decision-making. They're embedded at all levels of the business and when acting as a true business partner it is hard to tell the lawyers and the business apart. If you are working within the oil & gas sector for instance, you don't need to necessarily be half engineer half lawyer, however, you do need to understand how to contribute towards the bottom line and how to support business strategy.

One of the biggest advantages as in-house practitioner over private practice lawyers or other advisory based suppliers is the connectivity and understanding you have with the business. This isn't just about the physical location of your daily job but more concerned with the language the business uses and relationships you have built up over time. How connected you are to a business allows you not to just meet expectations, but to even anticipate them. The trust and relationships you can build, will assist you in demonstrating that you not only influence legal outcomes, but business outcomes as well.

In other words, in order to get a "seat at the table", no one gives it to you – you have to earn it.



Whenever I interview a candidate I'm always interested in hearing about their achievements, seniority and diversity of internal stakeholders i.e not just the legal department, how involved they have been in the decision-making process and the legacy they are leaving behind.

If you are only involved in the process at the end to review or write the contract are you partnering with the business or are you reacting to what the business gives you?

The role an in-house Counsel plays in a business is just as important as it was 50 years ago, the expectations from the business have just changed.

It certainly isn't easy too when most of the work you do is dedicated to making other people's work possible.

## About the Author



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