

Ask A Mentor: How Do I Adjust To In-House After BigLaw?

By **Sirisha Gummaregula** (October 27, 2025)

Experts answer questions on career and workplace conundrums in this Law360 Pulse guest column series. Have a question you're afraid to ask your law firm chair, practice area leader or mentor? Submit it anonymously [here](#).

In this installment, Sirisha Gummaregula at QuisLex offers advice on adjusting to in-house counsel life after leaving BigLaw, including by broadening legal expertise and understanding your company's business goals.

Q: I recently made a big career change and left my partnership and litigation practice at a BigLaw firm for an in-house counsel role. How do I ensure this shift goes smoothly, including navigating the new challenges that come with working in-house, while making the most of the perks (like a better work-life balance)?

—General Counsel at Tech Company

Congratulations on your new role! This career pivot is both exciting and transformative, and in my own journey — I moved in-house after working as an M&A lawyer at a BigLaw firm — it's proved to be a source of lasting purpose and growth.

You are already positioning yourself for success by thinking about the transition, and a good place to start is by understanding and anticipating both the challenges and the opportunities of moving from the law firm life to the in-house side. To make the shift with confidence, consider these core themes.



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Wearing Two Hats: Business and Legal

You'll find that being an effective in-house counsel demands more than excellent legal acumen. Your highest value will come from wearing both a legal and a business leader's hat — seeing beyond black-letter law into the full context of how your company operates and why it chooses certain paths.

Strive to become the colleague your business partners seek out before problems arise, not just after. This means learning the business inside and out: its mission, financials, key products, customers and pressure points. Ask questions with curiosity, and position yourself as a co-owner of the company's success. Your legal guidance will be sharper and more tailored, and you'll be welcomed as a solution-maker, not a gatekeeper.

Becoming a Trusted Adviser to Leadership

Earning trust at the executive table and with your board means shifting from "adviser at arm's length" to "thought partner in the room." You'll advise not only on what's permissible, but also on what's possible, practical and aligned with your company's values.

To do this effectively, engage with your business leaders early and often. Cultivate a reputation for clear, actionable advice grounded in the business's realities. Prepare for meetings by anticipating board-level concerns: risk, brand impact, stakeholder perception and sustainability. Executives and board members will challenge you, so your analysis or presentations shouldn't be limited to a legal viewpoint.

In my experience, I found the boardroom to be the best classroom of my professional career. There I was introduced to a broad spectrum of perspectives on a breadth of issues far beyond my focus through the legal lens. Take advantage of the unique opportunity you have in that environment for continuous learning on any number of business priorities. Over time, you'll find yourself invited into strategic decisions where your balanced insight is invaluable.

From Vertical Expertise to 360 Degree Perspective

While law firms often reward deep expertise, in-house legal leadership calls for a panoramic view. Every complex decision will affect, and be affected by, all areas of the business: technology, human resources, compliance, finance, reputation and operations.

Learn to scan the horizon as well as the details. Develop the habits of bringing different stakeholders around the table, listening for impacts beyond your immediate purview and weighing trade-offs holistically. Your ability to see the big picture will set you apart and enable smarter decisions.

Managing Budgets With Foresight and Flexibility

Budgeting calls for one of the biggest mindset shifts for new in-house leaders. Suddenly, you're not charging time by the hour; you're stewarding a finite budget, often with many variables and limited certainty about what's ahead. Take the time to learn your company's approach to forecasting, approving and monitoring legal spend.

Start with historical baselines, but be ready to adapt as new matters or uncertainties arise — regulatory changes, disputes or business pivots. Transparency and proactive communication with finance and leadership will set you up for success.

Remember, working efficiently is about more than just spending less. It's about investing wisely in internal headcount, and enabling tools or processes that deliver outsize value.

Leveraging Technology and Modern Tools

Modern in-house legal teams differentiate themselves by embracing technology — not only to do more with less, but to add new forms of value. As you settle in, take stock of the platforms your company uses or could use: e-billing, contract management, document automation, compliance dashboards, collaboration/workflow software and beyond.

Being proactive and tech-literate isn't just for IT teams — today, it's a leadership imperative for in-house counsel. Surround yourself with tech-savvy partners, learn from peers in legal operations, and keep an open mind about new tools that may streamline your work or provide better business insights. The ultimate goal? Freeing your team's time for the highest-value, most strategic work.

Building and Empowering Teams

Your success as in-house counsel is all about the team you nurture and bring together. I have found that the best solutions arise from diverse teams — technologists, lawyers, data analysts — working side-by-side to break silos and jointly own outcomes. You don't need to become a Six Sigma Black Belt, but adopting a mindset of continuous improvement will transform your impact. Ask questions, seek out cross-functional voices and invite process innovation.

When you give people the right tools and autonomy, extraordinary things happen.

Leading With Empathy and Collaboration

Recognize that the most lasting impact will come not just from technical expertise, but also from the relationships you build. Succeeding in an in-house environment relies on empathy — understanding what matters to your stakeholders, communicating clearly, and delivering legal advice that is both sound and actionable.

Lead by example: Foster collaboration, champion cross-functional initiatives and empower your team to take ownership of process improvements. When business partners perceive you as an ally and enabler, you'll be invited into the conversations that matter most.

Focusing on these themes will help you avoid overloading yourself and your team as you assess what resources you have available and work to leverage them correctly for various work. After all, you don't want to throw away the work-life balance that was such a draw to moving in-house. And sadly, it's too easy to skew the proportions. According to a 2023 report by Bloomberg, law firm attorneys notched fewer hours a week (47) compared to their in-house counterparts (who worked 50).[1]

And as you note, you need to consider your own workload and approaches to ensuring work-life balance. It may be tempting to jump in and try to fix everything yourself, particularly as a general counsel in today's legal and regulatory environment.

According to the Modern General Counsel Survey from Corporate Counsel Business Journal, 87% of respondents said that the GC role is shifting from that of a traditional legal adviser to that of a strategic and influential partner.[2] Among respondents, 69% pointed to growing responsibilities for risk areas such as cybersecurity, data privacy and risk management. More than half, 55%, said an increase in regulations and compliance mandates are another primary driver.

While these new spheres of influence are fascinating and help you become more fundamental to the business, they also add complexity to the role of GC.

In my own career, I've been inspired by Laura Morgan Roberts, who is the Frank M. Sands Associate Professor of Business Administration at the University of Virginia.[3] The four fundamental freedoms at work she has identified are:

1. Freedom to bring your authentic selves;
2. Freedom to become your best selves;
3. Freedom to step back at times in life when you need to without ramifications; and
4. The freedom to fail.

Whether at a law firm or in-house, I strive to allow every employee, regardless of their location or position, to experience those four fundamental freedoms every day.

One closing thought: Don't be afraid to challenge the status quo and constantly reevaluate where you are and where you need to be. I'd like to share the most important advice I've ever received: There is always more work to be done. Don't rest on what you've built. Instead, constantly evaluate yourself to understand changing perspectives and needs.

Your experience in BigLaw has armed you with discipline, rigor and technical command. Bringing those gifts into an in-house environment, while growing new competencies such as commercial insight, a holistic perspective, digital fluency and collaborative leadership, sets the stage for an even more impactful career.

Welcome the journey. With curiosity, humility and openness to learning, you'll find yourself not only navigating the change, but thriving as a trusted, business-minded leader for your organization.

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[1] <https://aboutblaw.com/baNK>.

[2] <https://ccbjournal.com/articles/the-evolving-role-of-general-counsel-in-2024-survey-results>.

[3] <https://www.linkedin.com/in/lauramorganroberts/>.