

The Challenges of Being In-House: Emotional Intelligence Matters

Back when I worked in-house not that long ago, I wrote [this piece](#) with Sarah Kalgaard, General Counsel of Vital Images, for the Association of Corporate Counsel about the top ten actions you might consider to help ensure a successful transition to becoming an in-house counsel. Here's an excerpt about our #5 point - "Reset Your Perfectionist Tendencies": In private practice, you are paid by the hour, and the expectation is perfection in every aspect. For example, at a law firm, never send a memo to a client with a typo. Hierarchical revision cycles exist in law firms to ensure you catch every little thing before it goes to the client. A mistake is unacceptable. In the in-house counsel's world, it is a little more "messy." Not everything has to be "perfect" and needs "A" effort. The amount of information, effort and precision to employ takes judgment – **your judgment and Emotional Intelligence (EQ) will likely be more valued than your IQ and legal knowledge.** You do not need to be a great legal expert to be a great in-house lawyer. Your guidance and work product should be sound, but it is often a lot less formal than at law firm - **think hallway conversations, text messages, and short emails with bullets.** Your judgment as to when to use what format will become invaluable. Many questions are asked seeking gut checks and common sense, and a more detailed review may or may not follow. The amount of time and effort to get from 95% correct to 100% is often not needed or wanted. But, when the stakes are high, do the work to get the guidance absolutely correct (maybe bounce it off outside counsel too), even if to the internal client the communication or guidance is not the formal memorandum you were taught. **Establish when and how to escalate matters to your supervisor or others** - continuously ask for feedback on this. **Be flexible.**

Unfortunately, business needs and priorities frequently shift. Even if you have spent a lot of time and effort on something the business said or thought they wanted, you may need to be able to pivot quickly as priorities change. **Ongoing communication is key**, so that you do not spend too much time on something that isn't yet fully developed.

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