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Network Spotlight: Cross-border

Interviews and Profiles





Charles Wilkinson

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Tell us about your background and your company's business.

I have extensive in-house experience handling complex matters involving international business operations, global trade, and anticorruption compliance. My areas of expertise include international contract negotiations, due diligence investigations, voluntary disclosures, risk analysis and mitigation, mergers, acquisitions, and divestitures, international dispute resolution, dealing with US and foreign government agencies, development of corporate policies, government relations, and employee training throughout the world. I am a US Air Force (JAG) veteran with service in the United States and overseas.

Ashland LLC is a premier, global specialty chemicals company serving customers in a wide range of consumer and industrial markets, including adhesives, architectural coatings, automotive, construction, energy, food and beverage, personal care, and pharmaceutical.

What interested you in the in-house practice of law, and how did you come to be in your current position?

My Air Force legal career was mostly in government contracts and moving into a corporate counsel role was a natural follow-on to that experience. I joined Ashland in 2007, initially to handle commercial contract matters, some of which involved international trade. Prior in-house positions had provided me with a lot of experience with international trade and anticorruption compliance. And that role increased significantly in 2009, resulting in a change of primary responsibilities, such that in 2012, the company relocated me to its Dublin, Ohio offices where the Global Trade Compliance group is based.

What is the single greatest challenge that your law department is facing today, and how are you dealing with it?

I think that the most significant challenge is achieving outstanding results with limited resources. I handle about 97 percent of the company's global trade legal issues myself and use law firm counsel in instances where I want a second opinion before proceeding.

In October 2017, you were elected chair of the International Legal Affairs Network (ILAN). How did you initially get involved?

I began attending ACC annual meetings in 2008, and at that time met ACC members from the ILAN. Several members inquired about my interest in becoming more involved with the ILAN, which eventually led to being selected to help organize Annual Meeting sessions and later to being nominated to fill leadership positions in the ILAN.

What are some of the ways that the ILAN provides value to its members?

The ILAN hosts a monthly one-hour "legal quick hit" (LQH) on a Wednesday evening each month for the Asia Pacific region members, with the same program being presented the next morning in the United States and Europe. The topics for the LQH vary and the ILAN, with its sponsor Primerus, varies the menu to provide a wide range of subject matter for these presentations. We also have a legal outreach initiative, courtesy of ILAN members who travel in their regular jobs and have time while in other parts of the world to meet with ILAN members.

What substantive practice issues does your network address?

After the annual meeting in October 2017, the ILAN's LQHs have covered Legal Professional Privilege and Attorney Secrecy in the EU: The Landscape in the Wake of the German Freshfields Firm Raid (November 2017); The EU General Data Protection Regulation: Perspectives on Business Opportunities and Practice Management Challenges (December 2017); Project Bank Accounts and Trust Structures to Protect Downstream Project Payments (December 2017); Navigating the NAFTA Crossroads: The NAFTA Renegotiations and What They Mean for Business (January 2018), Cryptocurrencies, Blockchain, and the Law (February 2018); Sexual Harassment: What it Means, How to Prevent it, Complaint Investigation, and Crucial Policies (March 2018); and The Do's and Don'ts for Employers to Avoid Allegations of Wage Disparity (April 2018). Upcoming for May 2018 is Third Party Litigation Funding, and there are several more topics being prepared for the remainder of 2018.

How has the ILAN helped to advance your career?

The ILAN has been a tremendous resource for meeting new colleagues and being able to learn from them about different approaches to handling matters as in-house counsel; often these newfound friends provide useful insights and a fresh way to look at things.

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