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## **Stock Up on These Executive Traits**

**Interviews and Profiles**



Rashida La Lande joined Kraft Heinz in January 2018 because she was intrigued by the company's global brand, which stretched into her pantry. The company's ubiquitous food and beverage products — from its eponymous Kraft cheese and Heinz ketchup to Philadelphia-brand cream cheese — sit in pantries in countries around the world, from the United States to Australia.

As a lover of cooking and food, she couldn't resist the opportunity to be part of a company that feeds people around the world. It also helped that the company was looking for a lawyer who could both protect the downside risks — consumers' tastes evolving — while also helping the company grow.





Rashida La Lande is helping Kraft Heinz adapt to evolving customer tastes while the company expands.

It was the first in-house role for La Lande. For the previous 17 years, she worked as an M&A lawyer. The exposure to various fields prepared her for the array of in-house issues she would need to

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tackle. Noting that M&A work wasn't something she knew about in law school, she says that she loved the negotiation and learning about each business from their leaders.

"M&A is all about what they need in the future — it's forward looking, and you need in-depth understanding of the businesses you represent," La Lande says.

If she was working on a technology deal, she would often learn a lot about IP. If she was working with a consumer-packaged goods company, then plant operations and labor and real estate became critical issues. Her M&A practice gave her exposure to different industries and experts in each field.

When La Lande first joined Kraft Heinz, she went on a listening tour. She wanted to hear from everyone: her legal team, business leaders, and other executives. She'd ask, "What keeps you up at night?" She wasn't only asking from a legal perspective. La Lande needed to understand what was happening at all levels of the company in order to offer guidance.

Her second focus in those first few months was her immediate legal team. While the law is clear in several regards, she says, there is a significant amount of judgment that is needed. La Lande sees her role as developing a smart, strong, and engaged team that has a growth mindset. She is more concerned with the mindset than the skillset. "It's easy to find someone with the proper law training, but you can't teach that mindset," she says.

## **Expanding responsibilities and shifting priorities**

About a year into her tenure as GC, Kraft Heinz's CEO decided La Lande should also be responsible for the company's environmental, social and governance (ESG) initiatives. It's a natural fit for her, not only because she's passionate about ESG, but because as a lawyer, she can put it within a framework that will work for the company. La Lande also noted it is a natural fit for the modern GC to also supervise ESG because of its relationship to legal and governance issues that they handle.

"It's both a risk and an opportunity for a company. Because there is a lot of policy, and auditing, and diligence and disclosure, both for SEC filings and for other reporting, lawyers are in a great position to manage that opportunity," she explains. La Lande predicts that ESG will get more and more attention from regulators like the SEC and investors but also consumers.

When the global COVID pandemic hit in 2020, Kraft Heinz focused on doing its part and making food people needed as food insecurity became even more of a crisis. The company has a goal to deliver 1.5 billion meals to people in need by 2025. It quickly added monetary and in-kind donations to food banks to offset the demand created by the pandemic.

## **Don't stress about the ceiling**

La Lande grew up in the working-class community of Jamaica, Queens, in New York City. The daughter of a teacher (her mother) and an electrician (her father), she was always asking questions and arguing. She was often told that she would make a great lawyer.

As she marched toward her JD, she would notice that there were not a lot of lawyers who looked like her. She spent a lot of time stressing about hitting a ceiling.

During her time at her law firm, "mentorship" was a mantra that was heard throughout the

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organization. Another saying was “you don’t have one mentor, you have many.” La Lande adds that it’s a two-way street. All of which is to say that she knows she didn’t get to where she is by herself.

She encourages members of her legal department to form mentorships, both within the department and across the company as a whole. “Sometimes work is barely mentioned in the mentorship and it’s just as effective,” she says, elaborating that serving in the community with coworkers is one way to further relationships.

La Lande stresses that it’s not worth worrying about things you can’t control — like not seeing colleagues or executives who look like you. She says: “Control the things that you can — make sure you are working hard, learning, growing, and continuing with that growth, that is where you will have the greatest impact.”

## **Getting to know... Rashida La Lande**

1. *You mentioned you like to cook. Any recipes that you have been cooking a lot during this stressful time?*

I go back and forth between elaborate meals and things I can make quickly and easily to feed the family — so everything is on the table, from pad thai to mac and cheese.

2. *When you first started working at Kraft Heinz, you asked your colleagues what keeps them up at night. What keeps you up at night as the pandemic is evolving and changing the business landscape?*

Whether the changes represent short-term adjustments or are more permanent.

3. *What’s the best advice you’ve received from a mentor? And the best advice you’ve given a mentee?*

A mentor once told me not to try to find work-life balance every day, but to focus on giving and getting what you need from life and balance over periods of time. I have found it to be true — after all, life changes, children get older, and needs are not the same — so I repeat it often.

[Joshua H. Shields](#)



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