



16 Lessons Learned in 2016

Skills and Professional Development



Although this year was, at times, quite difficult, it has been such an incredible journey. We've been fortunate to explore a wide variety of topics, meet many interesting people, and delve into unexpected, enriching discussions. Throughout it all, we've written and engaged with other professionals. This collaboration has been an amazing opportunity to learn things we wouldn't have possibly discovered otherwise. We believe in listening to a wide variety of voices, and that the more brainpower, the merrier! With that in mind, we wanted to highlight 16 incredible lessons we've learned in 2016.

Career development

1. You should approach your career the same way that you would approach structuring a business. You can even borrow from standard business principles and create a personal business plan. [Laura Lee Norris](#) told us all about her successful approach.
2. Hire your boss if the opportunity presents itself. Although it's unconventional, actively hiring your own boss is an amazing opportunity to hand-pick your mentor, and make sure your boss will fit into your organization. [Jesal Shah](#) and [Sarah Feingold](#) hired their bosses this year with great success.
3. Join a startup to "become an all-purpose, swiss army knife lawyer." This was one of our favorite quotes this year from an [amazing group of women](#), who told us all about their experiences working at startups.
4. Make sure you get out of your comfort zone and expand your viewpoint. This year, we were lucky to talk to many professionals about how lawyers can broaden their horizons. [Caroline Krass](#), general counsel of the CIA, taught us her perspective on working in the government sector. We

learned how to [adopt the bold communication strategies](#) commonly used by politicians, and were reminded about the importance of [reaching out and partnering with regulators](#) — especially for startup attorneys.

5. While many of us become managers, becoming a true leader takes focus, patience, and dedication to mastering the requisite skills. [Karna Nisewaner](#) taught us the three key approaches that she used to grow from a manager to a leader.

6. Stay on top of current market developments in your industry, and start thinking about how they will impact your company. We both work in the technology sector, and some highlights this year were learning about the world of [artificial intelligence](#) and the [internet of things](#).

Personal growth

7. Work through any symptoms of imposter syndrome you may have. Imposter syndrome is difficult, but you can overcome it. [Eve Chaurand](#) bravely and candidly shared her strategies and tips.

8. Amidst the chaos and drive to succeed, don't forget to slow down and take care of yourself. [Jeena Cho](#), author of the [Anxious Lawyer](#), taught us the incredible value of meditation.

9. Build, foster, and cherish your relationships — they will be the key to your professional success and feeling of fulfillment. [Katy Motiey](#) and [Kristin Sverchek](#) stressed the value of relationships and shared insights on how to maintain them even when switching jobs or experiencing unparalleled growth at your company.

10. Take responsibility for your actions, but never let your mistakes guide you. This is a critical lesson to remember at every point in your career. [Eleanor Lacey](#) shared how she learned to master this intricate balance.

11. Being a lawyer doesn't mean you should stop being who you are or having fun! We learned a lot from [Alexandra Sepulveda](#), who embodies using a creative approach to drive important legal messages home to business teams.

Activism and giving back

12. Always pay it forward. Whenever you start an organization, make sure that salaries and bonuses are actually equal on your team. Or support an up-and-coming attorney by being available as a mentor. Look to [Jan Kang](#), [Michelle Banks](#), and [Salle Yoo](#), who all embody the pay it forward spirit.

13. With the right co-conspirators, a small idea can flourish and grow into something impactful, even quicker than you think possible. We experienced this personally when we launched [SunLaw](#) in May of this year. With the help of our brilliant co-founders [Fatima Khan](#), [Debbie Rosenbaum](#), and [Rebecca Savage](#), it has grown into a diverse community of over 100 women in-house attorneys who are passionate about their careers and supporting each other to become the legal leaders of tomorrow.

14. We learned that as long as you don't let fear hold you back, you can make an impact using technology and social media. At the beginning of 2016, [24 Fortune 500 companies had no women on their boards](#). In 2016 we started a petition and social media movement, educating and encouraging

these companies to take initial steps toward gender equality on boards. We are happy to announce that six months later, at least five of the 24 companies have added a woman to their board. Some even thanked us for our efforts!

15. Embrace who you are and follow your passions. [Alexa King](#) proudly talked to us about being an advocate for what she believes in and using her advocacy to help her companies grow. Likewise, [Mary Rotunno](#) told us how she turned her passion for service into a career in healthcare law.

16. Last, but definitely not least, prioritize spending time with people who inspire you, provide you with honest feedback, and support your success. We have been so fortunate to learn from so many incredible people this year. We have also learned how amazing it is to co-author with someone who makes the whole process fun, interesting, and inspiring — even during the stressful times.

As we prepare for the new year during the hectic holiday season, it's always wonderful to look back and be reminded of so many important pieces of wisdom. It inspires us to learn more, keep growing, and tackle new subjects. Likewise, we would love to hear about your inspirations, nuggets of wisdom, and lessons learned from 2016. Feel free to share them with us using #16in2016.

Here's to more lessons in 2017, and a Happy New Year to all our ACC readers!

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Olga V. Mack is a fellow at CodeX, The Stanford Center for Legal Informatics, and a Generative AI Editor at law.MIT. Mack shares her views in her columns on ACC Docket, Newsweek, Bloomberg, VentureBeat, Above the Law, and many other publications.

Mack is also an award-winning (such as the prestigious ACC 2018 Top 10 30-Somethings and ABA 2022 Women of Legal Tech) general counsel, operations professional, startup advisor, public speaker, adjunct professor, and entrepreneur. She co-founded SunLaw, an organization dedicated to preparing women in-house attorneys to become general counsels and legal leaders, and WISE to help female law firm partners become rainmakers.

She has authored numerous books, including *Get on Board: Earning Your Ticket to a Corporate Board Seat*, *Fundamentals of Smart Contract Security* and *Blockchain Value: Transforming Business Models, Society, and Communities*. She is working on her next books: *Visual IQ for Lawyers* (ABA 2024), *The Rise of Product Lawyers: An Analytical Framework to Systematically Advise Your Clients Throughout the Product Lifecycle* (Globe Law and Business 2024), and *Legal Operations in the Age of AI and Data* (Globe Law and Business 2024).

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