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Oregon Chapter Leader Spotlight

Interviews and Profiles



Jim Williams

I joined Xerox almost 10 years ago after working for one of the largest law firms in Portland, Oregon. In private practice, I primarily worked on business transactions and over time I learned that I really enjoyed not only the legal issues, but also the business side. When the opportunity to work for Xerox came my way, it was a perfect fit for my career. My current role is senior counsel and I provide legal support to Xerox's United States Channels Group, which generates over \$1 billion annually on sales through distributors, sales agents, dealers and resellers. What I like most about being in-house is working closely with my clients, not only on their legal issues and challenges, but also their business challenges, opportunities and strategies.

What are some of the skills in-house counsel need to hone to advance their careers?

I believe the most important skill is leadership. First, understand your company's vision and motivate the people around you to work toward the same goals and objectives. Be passionate and excited about your company's business. Second, encourage and enable others to take on new challenges, roles and responsibilities. Finally, leaders not only understand their company's vision, but they help shape the future by providing strategic input. In-house counsel should be at the table with management and be an active member of the management team as a trusted advisor who proactively offers ideas and solutions. In addition to leadership, in-house counsel must develop the business acumen to truly understand their client's financial statements, business operations and accounting objectives. Often, the in-house lawyer is the person who spots accounting, tax or operational issues when working on a transaction and resolving those issues early on is a tremendous value add to the business.

How did you first become involved in leadership in the Oregon Chapter and can you highlight some of the key milestones of the Oregon Chapter?

I started attending the Oregon chapter's CLE programs immediately after I joined Xerox. Within a year, I was asked if I would be interested in serving on the chapter board. I immediately said yes and have served as treasurer and president-elect and am currently serving as chapter president. During my time serving on the Oregon chapter board, the Oregon Chapter has doubled its membership. We've expanded our programs so that in addition to regular CLE programs we now offer unique programs such as our Professional Development Program, "At 5 Socials," mentoring program and several special events throughout the year such as our annual golf event and wine tasting tour.

How does your chapter promote meaningful connections and provide value to its members?

A couple of years ago we surveyed our chapter members and we learned that our members wanted more opportunities to socialize and more programs on career development. We now have quarterly "At 5" social events where there is no agenda and no sponsor. We started a mentoring program that pairs a more senior in-house attorney with a newer in-house attorney. Our Professional Development Program focuses on the development of the so-called soft skills or leadership skills for our members. We also innovate in the traditional area of CLE programs. We recently held a CLE on mergers and acquisitions in a "speed dating" format where our members moved from table to table to discuss different stages of an M&A transaction — e.g. deal structure, due diligence, representations and warranties, post-closing issues. In our quarterly newsletter, we interview a chapter member where we focus on unique facts, background, hobbies and interests of our spotlighted member. At most of our

events we host a social hour before the program so our guests have time to socialize and get to know each other on a personal level.

What are ways members can become involved in your chapter?

Our members are encouraged to reach out to me or any of our board members. Most of our board members started by getting involved in program planning or serving on a committee. We are always looking to try new programs or host creative events.

What advice would you give to chapter leaders of small chapters or newer chapters?

Be creative. Don't be afraid to experiment with new programs or events. Recruit leaders who are "doers." Each year, our new board members bring fresh and innovative ideas to our chapter. Plan your year in advance. In January, we hold our board retreat where we plan the entire year and assign a board member to lead planning, coordination and execution of each event. Leverage "cool stuff" you have access to and host events at unique venues. Our members who attended our recent Professional Development Program event at the Nike World Headquarters received a pass to the Nike employee store, which is a great perk. Finally, keep an eye out for what other chapters are doing. We will be hosting a ski and CLE event next year, which we learned about from another chapter. Sending chapter leaders to the ACC Leadership Development Institute is a great way to learn about the innovative offerings of other ACC chapters.

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