

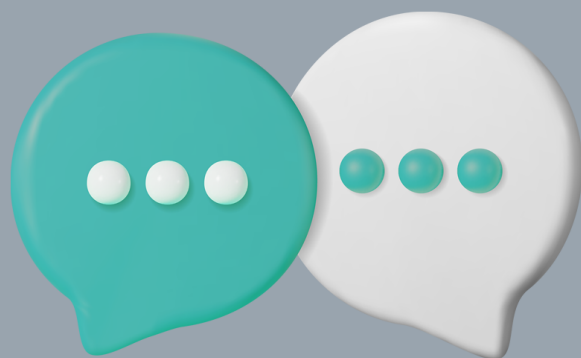


InConversation with ACC's Jason L. Brown

Community

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Jason L. Brown

President & CEO

Association of Corporate Counsel

When Jason L. Brown stepped into the role of President & CEO of the Association of Corporate Counsel, he brought with him more than two decades of experience across private practice, in-house leadership, and association governance.

In two recent *InConversation* webcasts with members across time zones, Brown shared the personal journey that shaped his leadership style.

Discussing with ACC's VP and CHRO Patricia "PJ" Trudeau, Brown offered a clear message to ACC members worldwide: This is **a moment of rapid change for the profession**, and the in-house community must **stay connected, proactive, and engaged**.

A career shaped by business immersion

Brown traced his path from Minneapolis to Chicago and Louisville, reflecting on how his in-house roles expanded from litigation and compliance to leading complex legal teams across regulated and global businesses. Early in his corporate career, he learned that **strong legal judgment is inseparable from operational understanding**.

"Working at Pepsi, the first month I started working there, I rode on a truck to deliver Pepsi at 5 am to grocery stores in the Chicagoland area, learning and understanding the business," he said, describing how on-the-ground exposure strengthened his ability to advise and defend the enterprise.

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That same approach carried through to later leadership roles. At GE Appliances, he **immersed himself in the business beyond the legal function** to better understand the work and pressures of frontline operations — by stepping in and helping build refrigerators. "I apologize to anyone who received one of those refrigerators that I had a hand in making," Brown joked, adding that stepping outside the office helped him connect legal advice to real business priorities.

"The best way to really develop and build your business acumen is to do it. Get your hands dirty," Brown shared. "You don't just learn from watching, you don't just learn from asking questions, you really learn from doing and being engaged — and not just for your own benefit, but for people to see you out there doing it and understand that you're building a greater connection to **understand truly how this business works**."

Brown's global experience working for multi-national brands also shaped his view of modern legal leadership — particularly the need to **navigate supply chains, multinational teams, and geopolitical realities**.

"**Companies have their footprint all around the globe**, and many of them have legal departments and team members all over the globe," he said. "Even though we're separated in ways by language and culture and laws and those types of things, the bottom line is clear: If you're in the legal department, your one job is to provide outstanding legal service to your organizations."

Why ACC? The people

Asked what excites him most about leading ACC, Brown pointed first to the association's **community — members, volunteers, and staff** who make ACC's resources and connections possible.

"The thing that is most exciting is honestly the people," he said.

Brown described ACC as central to his own growth as an in-house lawyer. He emphasized that the organization's mission is not simply to inform members, but to **elevate the role of in-house counsel in the broader global environment**.

"I can't be more excited to take the reins and continue to push the envelope when it comes to increasing that membership value that I realized and I knew, and then also meeting the challenges ahead for our industry," Brown shared. "Trying to make sure that we have the proverbial '**seat at the table**' when it comes to discussing the major issues of the day that impact not just legal."

[Learn more about ACC's Seat at the Table initiative](#)

"We have a very critical voice in that, and I think we have an opportunity and an obligation to let it be heard," Brown added, urging the profession to remain visible and influential in major issues shaping business and society.

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There's no playbook for in-house counsel

One recurring theme was Brown's belief that **in-house counsel learn the role through experience and community**, not through a standard curriculum.

"There isn't a playbook for being in-house counsel," he said. Brown credited **ACC engagement** — especially at the chapter level — with **opening doors, expanding perspective, and building the relationships** that sustain in-house careers over time. He shared how his first exposure to ACC in Chicago evolved from attending events to volunteering, joining leadership, and ultimately serving as chapter president.

He also emphasized that **ACC's value extends beyond lawyers alone**.

"ACC has an ecosystem," Brown shared. "It's not just the lawyers that work in-house and the people that are members of ACC. It's the folks that are in legal ops, it's folks that are our vendors and stakeholders that come to the Annual Meetings and other events that we do that help you as members grow in your career."

And he named a practical reason that resonates globally: Many in-house counsel work in small

departments. “Sometimes being an in-house counsel is a lonely job,” he added, pointing to [ACC Mentor Match](#) and [ACC’s Career Corner offerings](#) as ways for in-house lawyer to stay supported and connected.

Brown underscored that sustainable leadership requires intentional well-being — not only for individual leaders, but for legal teams. “You have to make it a priority,” he said, highlighting ACC’s [Well-being Toolkit](#) and emphasizing that **leaders cannot be effective if they neglect their own health and resilience**.

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AI and the expanding GC portfolio

Turning to trends beyond AI, Brown described a profession in which CLOs are increasingly expected to **lead across enterprise priorities — not simply react to legal risk**.

“The job isn’t what it used to be. **[GCs] are managing more than the legal department**,” he said, citing how legal leaders are often tapped to help steer areas such as cybersecurity and other strategic responsibilities.

To succeed, he emphasized “**non-legal skills**” and a “**business-first mindset**,” while still grounding advice in legal expertise. He also pointed to legal operations as a core lever for improving efficiency, using metrics, and managing the modern law department — reinforcing ACC’s focus on supporting legal ops professionals and integrating them into the ACC community.

Brown described AI as **a transformative wave** and an area where ACC must remain a leading voice for in-house counsel. Speaking of the [ACC AI Center of Excellence for In-house Counsel](#), he emphasized: “It is a living, breathing thing that evolves as AI evolves.”

He also called for the profession to **stay proactive** — building partnerships and anticipating issues — rather than reacting after new tools and risks have already reshaped the business environment. “We need to be proactive and not reactive to new issues or new technologies that emerge,” Brown said.

Brown also highlighted **geopolitical complexity as a persistent and growing pressure** on legal departments. “What happens in one country may have a very significant impact on what’s going on with one of our member companies and one of you,” Brown said. “How do we help you provide strategic advice on those issues that are rising halfway around the world? That’s part of our goal.”

[Learn more with the Essential Toolkit for New General Counsel](#)

Trust as a leadership discipline

Brown returned repeatedly to the **relationship between trust and leadership**, describing three principles he believes are essential for credibility inside organizations and within ACC.

“Transparency, accountability, and consistency,” he said.

He framed those principles as central not only to how in-house counsel build influence with CEOs and boards, but also to ACC’s commitment to members. “I want you all to feel that the data that we’re sharing with you, the resources that we’re sharing with you, you can absolutely trust — because they have been vetted, they have been screened, and the I’s have been dotted and T’s have been crossed multiple times before we deliver content to you.”

Demonstrating “impact,” not just “value”

Brown drew a distinction that many CLOs will recognize: Legal departments do not always show up neatly in financial statements, even when their work is essential.

“It’s all about impact,” he said, noting that “value” is often interpreted through a narrow financial lens.

He defined **impact as legal being brought in earlier, enabling decisions faster, and using technology and process improvements to deliver measurable gains** — like reducing contract review cycle time and freeing legal teams to focus on higher-order risks and strategy.

If you immerse yourself in how your company works — and **let others see that you understand the business** beyond the legal issue — you’ll demonstrate your business acumen in a tangible way, Brown shared.

He encouraged members to **make professional development a deliberate goal** — especially outside traditional CLEs — pointing to ACC’s [Corporate Counsel University](#), [Mini MBA](#), and [Executive Leadership Institute](#) as avenues for building enterprise leadership capability.

The strength of this organization is all of you as our members.

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The message to members: “Lean in”

Brown ended with a clear call to action — positioning ACC as a platform for **collective influence, professional growth, and community impact**.

“We can do some really powerful things in the legal community, but you’ve got to be an active member, an active part of it,” he said. “The strength of this organization is all of you as our members.”

His closing encouragement was simple and well-suited to the moment the profession is in now:

“Lean in, and **be an active part of the positive impact** that you can make. Because if we do it collectively, there’s really nothing that we can’t do,” Brown said.

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