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Jason's Journal: Leading with Purpose

Community

Law Department Management

Skills and Professional Development



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For nearly two decades, I've had the privilege of serving in-house at some of the world's most recognizable companies — GE Appliances, Dyson, MillerCoors, and others. I've advised CEOs through strategic pivots, worked with regulators during high-pressure investigations, partnered with boards through moments of uncertainty, and led legal teams through industry, technology, and cultural shifts.

Now, as I step into the role of CEO of the [Association of Corporate Counsel \(ACC\)](#), I've been reflecting on the lessons that shaped me — and how those experiences will guide the work ahead for our global in-house community.

Because despite the industries, geographies, or organizational charts, one truth remains constant: In-house counsel are uniquely positioned to influence business outcomes — not just protect them.

And that responsibility is growing.

1. The modern GC must be a business strategist — not just a legal technician.

When I first became a general counsel, the expectations were clear: ensure compliance, protect the brand, close deals, and avoid headlines.

Today, those expectations look very different. Boards want strategic advisors. CEOs want business partners. Employees want ethical stewards. Communities want responsible corporate citizens.

The legal function now sits at the crossroads of:

- technology disruption
- geopolitical uncertainty
- cybersecurity and data governance
- ESG demands
- evolving workplace culture
- intensifying regulatory scrutiny

And increasingly, companies expect the GC to help set — not just follow — corporate strategy.

This shift isn't temporary. It's structural. And it requires every in-house lawyer, not just the GC or Chief Legal Officer (CLO), to develop fluency in business, leadership, communication, crisis management and innovation.

2. Working with regulators requires candor, credibility, and consistency.

Across industries, regulatory environments have grown more complex, fragmented, and fast-moving. One lesson I learned early is that a company's reputation with regulators is earned long before a crisis. That means:

- be transparent before you must
- proactively build relationships
- ask questions early and often
- treat regulators as stakeholders — not adversaries

Most regulators aren't looking to punish; they're looking to protect. When companies demonstrate good faith, accountability, and preparedness, outcomes change. And legal departments play a crucial role in building and maintaining that trust.

3. Your relationship with the board is one of your most important tools.

In-house lawyers sometimes underestimate their influence in the boardroom.

Don't.

Boards rely on counsel not just for legal interpretation, but for:

- risk prioritization
- ethical leadership
- cultural awareness
- geopolitical perspective
- operational context
- crisis navigation

The most effective GCs don't wait to be asked — they educate, contextualize, and challenge when necessary. Courage is part of the job.

4. AI isn't the future of in-house practice — it's the present.

Every company I've encountered recently is exploring AI in some form: productivity tools, legal research, contract generation, predictive analytics, or business operations. In-house counsel must lead this evolution, not react to it. That means asking:

- How are we governing AI use responsibly?
- Do we understand the data behind the tools?
- Where are the ethical, legal, and reputational risks?
- Are we building AI literacy inside the department?
- How do we balance efficiency with accountability?

AI won't replace in-house counsel, but lawyers who use AI strategically will replace those who don't.

Through the ACC [AI Center of Excellence for In-house Lawyers](#), our mission is to equip every member with the knowledge, frameworks, training, governance models, and real-world examples needed to adopt AI confidently and responsibly.

The goal isn't just to keep up — it's to lead.

5. Culture is a legal strategy — not an HR one.

Whether managing investigations, compliance, corporate integrity, or workplace challenges, I've seen the same pattern over and over: strong cultures help prevent legal problems before they start.

Legal departments must help organizations:

- reward ethical behavior
- encourage speaking up
- protect psychological safety
- prioritize transparency
- reflect the communities they serve

And leaders must model that culture — visibly and consistently.

6. Belonging is a business imperative.

Throughout my career — and through involvement in NAMWOLF, manufacturing, education, and community work — I've seen how belonging transforms teams.

People perform differently when they feel:

- trusted
- valued
- included
- respected

- supported professionally and personally

Associations like ACC play a pivotal role in creating that belonging at scale — connecting lawyers across industries, borders, backgrounds, and career stages.

Community isn't a benefit. It's an accelerant.

Where we're going next at ACC

ACC has always been an advocate, educator, connector, and champion for in-house counsel. But the world our members operate in has changed dramatically.

So must we.

As CEO, my priorities include:

- Expanding global reach and collaboration
- Strengthening executive leadership development for current and future GCs
- Advancing responsible AI adoption and readiness
- Supporting legal departments in demonstrating value and significant impact
- Increasing programming, tools, and research tied to real operational challenges
- Broadening community, accessibility, and belonging for all members

The goal is simple: Ensure every in-house lawyer — anywhere in the world — has the resources, connections, and confidence to lead.

A final reflection

In-house counsel hold one of the most complex, demanding, and meaningful roles in business. Our work protects people, shapes industries, and strengthens communities.

ACC is here to support that work — not just with [education](#) and [research](#), but with solidarity, shared experience, and a global professional family.

I'm grateful for the legal leaders, mentors, teams, and colleagues who shaped my journey, and I'm honored to begin this next chapter with all of you.

Our work matters.

Our community matters.

And the future of the in-house profession has never been more promising.

Let's build it — together.

[Join ACC's global network of in-house counsel today!](#)

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[Jason L. Brown](#)



President & CEO

Association of Corporate Counsel

Jason L. Brown is the president and CEO of the Association of Corporate Counsel (ACC), leading the world's largest global organization for in-house counsel and advancing its mission to support, connect, and advocate for the profession worldwide.

Before joining ACC, Jason served as vice president, general counsel, and secretary for GE Appliances, where he led global legal strategy, compliance, governance, and government affairs. He

previously held senior legal leadership roles at Dyson, Inc. and MillerCoors and began his career in private practice in Minneapolis before moving into corporate law.

Jason has also served as executive director of NAMWOLF and held legal leadership positions at Pepsi Beverages Company. He currently serves on the board of directors for Legal Prep Charter Academy and the Howard University School of Law Board of Visitors.

A proud graduate of Howard University, Jason earned both his undergraduate and law degrees there and serves as president of the Howard University School of Law International Alumni Association.