



For over a decade LOD has been partnering with clients to provide lawyers on secondment into in-house legal teams around the world. One of the consistent pieces of feedback we receive is the ability of our secondees to seamlessly integrate into our clients' teams and start adding value. Over this time, we've gathered a wealth of information about how secondees can 'hit the ground running.' We've seen what works and where challenges tend to form and need to be overcome.

By synthesising our internal know-how with fresh advice from several seconded in-house lawyers and legal managers across the UK and Asia Pacific, we've distilled 10 key tips. Read on for some tips for those managing secondees:

## 1) Understand the organisation you're joining

This sounds simple – but don't be deceived. The consistent advice here is to really get under the skin of the organisation. What are the objectives of the organisation and what role do you need to play to help achieve these? In the case of private corporations, you should get to know the commercial aims, the revenue model, recent industry changes and wider market conditions. For government and charities, it's just as critical to understand the aims of the organisation, its history and relevant trends. If you don't know the mission of the team you're joining, it's going to be hard to contribute.

### Manager tips:

- Arrange for your new joiner to have the company key documents on arrival (or, even better, in advance of their first day).
- Set up a meeting with a commercial (or departmental) manager who can provide a whistle-stop tour of the organisational aims and KPIs within their first week.

## 2) Get hyper clear on roles & responsibilities

Hopefully during the introduction process you were given a clear set of responsibilities for your new role. And while your Job Description should spell this out, the common advice here is to scrutinise this as early as possible – ask clarifying questions during your interview to dispel any ambiguity. Further, you need to get to grips with not only your specific role – but also the work scope of your colleagues. This helps to ensure against duplicating efforts and, more broadly, the problem of 'role creep.' By knowing what you're doing and knowing what your team is doing, you'll be ensuring not only your productivity but the wider team efficiency.

### Manager tips:

- Make sure the Job Description is accurate and meaningful – if you have an existing team member proximate to that role, ask them to review it.
- Book in a meeting as early as possible with your new secondee and the team to not only introduce everyone, but allow each team member to explain in their own words what they do.

## 3) Who's who in the zoo?

One of the more challenging parts of a new role is understanding who does what across the business. This can be particularly difficult if you're put into a large, matrixed organisation where your role heavily interfaces with multiple stakeholders. And the challenge is further accentuated in the remote working environments that many people find themselves in. The first step is to get hold of an organisational chart and start mentally mind-mapping people to functions. Hopefully (see managers tips below) you'll also have a buddy to help provide context around everyone and answer some of your questions.

Building rapport is essential in any job, but even more pronounced when you're being seconded into an organisation. You have to work harder and faster than most – so tee up some video calls early and don't be afraid to break the ice with some general chat before getting stuck into business.

### Manager tips:

- Assign your new joiner a 'buddy.' Both to help them feel welcome and to answer more routine questions without distracting you at a later date.
- Issue them with both an organisational chart and a group company structure diagram.
- One of the best-in-breed practices here is to not only have a basic Visio style org chart – but to have a whole team PowerPoint which goes into more detail and provides colour around each individual. This helps with cultivating a sense of belonging.



#### 4) Get to know the internal playbook

Every team has its idiosyncrasies. They work together in certain ways and your job, as early as possible, is to work out their collaboration and communication styles. While some places will have clear guidance on this, most of the time you just have to figure it out. This is an example of where a buddy can help you. If in doubt, it's better to ask questions and not make assumptions. As one secondment lawyer said, "There is a balance to be struck between taking the initiative and not being presumptuous."

##### **Manager tips:**

- Provide your new joiner with documentation around the sign-off process, the company powers of attorney and delegations more broadly. If you have a communication style guide, this should be provided on day one.

#### 5) Know your risk appetite - and limits!

One of the biggest shifts for lawyers coming into in-house for the first time is the adjustment in the risk settings. Further, even experienced in-house lawyers will have to clarify the risk appetite in a new organisation as they vary quite widely. To uncover this, make sure you ask your manager to explain (or provide docs on) what the relevant risk thresholds are. Where the risk is elevated, this is where you may need to be briefing outside counsel - so understand the process and budget for that.

##### **Manager tips:**

- If you have a risk matrix or guidance document, this should be provided.
- Share the details of your panel relationships and the process for engaging outside counsel.

#### 6) 'Course correct' early

You're not a mind-reader, so it's very unlikely you'll fully understand exactly what is being asked of you every time you receive instructions. Don't be afraid to obtain quick clarifications as early as possible. And just like in sailing, the earlier you course correct, the better. As one of our secondment lawyers said, "Do not assume the Business is giving you everything required to answer the query and don't be afraid to question the instructions."

##### **Manager tips:**

- Before providing instructions, do a quick mental check to see whether you're assuming knowledge they might not have yet!
- Encourage them to ask questions and playback instructions.

#### 7) Don't reinvent the wheel

Put simply, know where you can access historical advice. In-house lawyers often face similar or repeated issues - so understanding where to get the previous advice is crucial to efficient and effective work. The last thing you want to do is sink hours and hours of your time into a previously resolved matter.

##### **Manager tips:**

- Ensure your new joiners are provided with access to your knowledge management system on Day 1.

## 8) Make friends with I.T.

We all know that when joining a new organisation, lots of common frustrations form around getting the I.T. working. New laptops, email accounts, printer connectivity, software access... the list goes on. Your best ally to head these issues off before they impact your ability to get the job done is I.T.

### Manager tip:

- Assign your new joiners a dedicated member of the I.T. team to contact with queries and issues – it's much easier and more welcoming than having to do everything through the normal service desk approach.

## 9) Don't doubt yourself

This is best articulated by one of our more senior secondment lawyers: "Everyone has anxiety in the beginning, especially when you're at a mid-senior level. They want you to come in and start straight away. A lot of it is about confidence and self-belief. It's about valuing who you are and what your skills are. Do not doubt yourself. They want to be able to trust you and you have to feel you're worthy of their trust. Don't be afraid to make mistakes and ask questions. You shouldn't put the pressure on yourself that you should know everything."

### Manager tip:

- While this part is mainly about secondment lawyers being able to trust themselves, you can help their confidence by reminding them that you trusted them enough to engage them!

## 10) Capture as you go

Our final recommendation is to capture the relevant information in a shared document for future secondees. This is about institutional knowledge – but it's also about 'paying it forward.' If you've had to battle to uncover 'how' the business works, it makes sense to save future secondees (or new joiners) the hassle where you can. This will help reduce future friction and will also demonstrate your ability to forward plan.

### Manager tip:

- Save all the orientation and welcome documents in a safe, easily accessible space and perform a retrospective with the new joiner at the end of the week. Ask them what would have been helpful, what was unnecessary etc.

### Further LOD guidance

- [How to demonstrate the value of in-house legal](#) (article)



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