



Increase Your Influence

6 stages of positioning for in-house legal teams to impact business strategy



Over the past decade, we've transformed the way in which lawyers, consultants and legal teams work. Today, we're one of the largest and fastest growing flexible legal services businesses, continuing to lead the market we created and completing hundreds of assignments with the world's leading businesses and law firms.

Winning numerous awards along the way, LOD is continually recognised for creating different and better ways of working for both lawyers and legal teams.

The merger between LOD and AdventBalance in Asia and Australia has created a NewLaw business with global scale; ten offices, 600 lawyers, and more than 500 corporate and law firm clients. It has been described as "one of the most significant deals in years in the legal services sector" (American Lawyer).

Introduction

It's a familiar feeling: you've got a great idea that solves a problem for the business (maybe using our 'Creative Problem Solving' Toolkit, right?), but you're having trouble making yourself heard in amongst your peers.

The thing is, the issue isn't so much about that specific idea, but how the business views you and your team. Lawyers and legal teams have historically fallen foul to the stereotype of paper shufflers that try to ruin everyone else's big ideas. Luckily, those days are gone. However, the legacy of this can still impede your team's ability to really make an impact.

At LOD we think that it's time to banish that 'killjoy' ghost. We believe that by taking control of the conversation around your team and taking a nimble approach to problem solving, it's possible to start shifting the way you and your legal team is seen within the business.

The role of the GC and their team has expanded beyond that of safeguarding the organisation against legal and ethical transgressions, to an increasingly diverse range of work aimed at informing the central business strategy. The most valuable in-house teams are already acting like business leaders and positioning themselves as generators of ideas that grow the business.

Read on to explore the 6 steps that we suggest can be taken by legal teams to raise their impact within the business to accelerate the process of being seen as a business partner. Our ideas aren't there to be followed to the letter and they may not all be appropriate for every situation, but we hope they start the process of making you and your legal team's ideas come to life.

#1

Define yourself

Lawyers and accountants are often attributed the notorious stereotype of being a wall to get through, rather than a value add. Instead of conforming, or allowing others to label your team, take control and define yourself.

Law describes itself as a 'department' of the business, instead of part of the mission of the business. A successful legal team will find the balance between protecting the business and positioning it to grow. It's not about risk avoidance, but risk management: you are a senior business person who makes things happen using, amongst other things, a legal skill set.

Act first to position yourself, don't wait to be allocated a traditional legal role. When you take control of how you are defined, you take yourself out of the pigeon hole. Senior stakeholders are increasingly looking for more than just legal advice from their legal team, so take the opportunity to show people who you are and the influence you can have on the business goals.

You should think about:

- Changing the language of how you describe your legal team
- Addressing an idea or problem outside the legal and risk management sphere - think about cost reduction or revenue generation
- Legal as a strategic skillset the business benefits from, rather than a side department



#2

Talk to the right people

Any business solution needs to have the buy-in of the people that it may affect, and it's important that you talk to them before you've come to a full and finished concept. Those you are trying to impact - whether it be the Board, your management team, or your colleagues - aren't a behemoth that operates in a single way. Listening to them, talking to them and seeing them as individuals allows you to have a wider view of how to start making ideas happen.

The aim here is not only to find out who you should be working with to make an idea or solution happen, but to make sure that when you are speaking the person listening tunes in, rather than out. If you can make what's on their agenda happen, they will listen.

Whilst looking upwards, it's also important to look laterally. Build a support network from the bottom up by finding team members to input and endorse your innovation. If you listen to all levels of the organisation you will learn - the boss does not always make the decision and leaders are heavily influenced by their teams.

Focus on:

- Listening and communicating how your idea helps achieve other people's objectives at all levels
- Build rapport with peers in other departments by being seen as an ally
- Getting broad, not just senior, support

#3

Gain trust

At the end of the day, you have to attain a level of trust within the business so that not only will people turn to you when there is an issue, but they will also value your opinion and involvement on other matters. Instead of just reacting to an issue from a legal perspective, the legal team should also be viewed as trusted advisors who can help remove obstacles and foster business objectives in a proactive manner.

You need to be seen as a team that will analyse problems, offer reasoned recommendations and, when necessary, disagree about an issue or course of action. Building trust is key to this role and in some instances, you may even be called upon to mediate internal conflict. This strategy lets people know you are there to contribute to the company's success, rather than only to act as a watchdog who helps the company avoid trouble.

If you earn the trust of your colleagues, they will consult you and your team more frequently on matters that may ordinarily sit outside the sphere of general legal issues.

Consider:

- Getting things done - trust is generated by delivery not procrastination
- Analysing problems in a broader context than legal
- Offering to help on issues and bottlenecks outside the traditional legal remit



#4

Bide your time

Where does your solution sit in the context of the wider business strategy? Take the time to really understand the values, goals and culture of the business. Don't forget to look externally at the competition - are others doing this already or are you a first mover? A thorough understanding of the business and industry is essential to providing intelligent and meaningful advice (whether legal or strategic).

Look internally at the people you will be talking to about this. Those you are trying to impact have their own agenda on what drives the business strategy. Find out what is on their schedule in the coming weeks, so you know when will be a good time to discuss it. Patience is key here, catch them at the wrong time and a great idea could all of a sudden be seen as misguided and annoying.

It's vital to remember that you are not creating a solution for yourself, or even your team, you're suggesting ideas and direction for the business in line with its goals - otherwise there is no incentive to say yes. Remember that corporate positions change, so be mindful of not just the yearly plan, but what will work right now.

Think about:

- What the business and competitors are focusing on
- Why your idea or solution fits the company and personal agenda right now
- The appropriate time to discuss your idea



#5

Collaborate

Instead of presenting a solution you have fully formed, be seen as a partner by creating opportunities for those you are trying to impact. Associate an idea with the person who can make it happen by aligning it with their values and working with them to make it their idea too.

Start interaction as early as possible in the innovation process as doing this avoids having to do the hard sell to a group of unsuspecting people at the end. If they think the initial idea has legs, they will give you the time to feedback and inject their own ideas.

Focusing on smaller interactions - rather than one long sermon with a fully formed idea - can feel strange, especially as a lawyer. Though this may take longer to make things happen, it will do two things for you: (1) serve to help you be seen as a partner to the business, and (2) make it more likely for your idea or solution to be adopted.

Don't be afraid of:

- Criticism and push back (this is the best point to hear it)
- Moving away from one big pitch to several smaller discussions
- Using phrases like 'I agree with you', 'As you just said' and 'I saw you do X, maybe we could use that here too' to align your idea with other people

#6

Present yourself

You've taken the time to build trust, contextualise, talk to people and associate your idea with their agenda. Though you've sewn the initial seed for this idea by asking for input and discussion, there will likely come a time where you need to present this more formally before you can take it from idea to reality.

Success lies in the ability to pitch like a business person, rather than a lawyer. Bear in mind that your audience may come from a number of disciplines, so present your ideas like a business plan (hint: lawyers use paragraphs, CEOs use bullet points), to gain broad appeal. Don't just talk about the legal implications of the plan, but also the impact on the wider business, the financials, and the industry.

The language you use here is vital, and adopting a universal style will keep the different types of people you are talking to engaged. Be succinct and really think about your headlines for each section. Finally, and probably most importantly, make the next steps easy – even if they like the idea, if the barrier for action is too high, nothing will happen.

Consider:

- Keeping the language you are using action centred
- Owning the potential problems your idea may create, as well as the benefits
- Updating the people you've been working with so the final presentation holds no surprises
- Whether the next steps are easy enough



Conclusion

Change perceptions, create ideas and talk to the right people. There is no 'right' way to do this, but we hope these 6 steps will give you the foundation to make the moves you want. As you employ these techniques and start to shape your team as part of the mission of the business, you will get more and more opportunities to have input.

There is no doubt that businesses are looking for a lot more than just legal advice from their internal counsel, so the time is ripe to start making these kinds of moves. As you actively insert yourself into the business the people you want to talk to will not only make time for you, they will start coming to you. Each solution, strategy or idea you have will more likely be considered as the perception of you and your team changes.

In-house lawyers are more commercial than ever. Businesses are increasingly aware of their individual and collective risk and are seeking business advice from their trusted legal adviser. For the best GCs and their teams, this means the opportunity to show their true value to the business as a whole.

One final thing to remember: if you get the buy-in and sign off to take an idea forward, the onus of responsibility will lie with you and your team to make it work. It's head-above-the-parapet time, which might not sit as comfortably with the legal team as with other disciplines. However, when you succeed it will pave the way to change the legal team's reputation within the business forever.



Other Toolkits in the series

Measure Your Impact

8 KPIs for in-house legal teams

Creative Problem Solving

5 stages of Design Thinking for in-house legal teams

Contact LOD



Brisbane
+617 3221 2906

Dubai
+971 4 4019968

Hong Kong
+852 2996 7300

London
+44 20 3642 0000

Melbourne
+613 9620 0640

Munich
+49 89 2153 9889 1

New York
+1 212 521 4070

Perth
+618 6380 7600

Singapore
+65 6326 0200

Sydney
+612 8014 5110

LODlaw.com