



POST-EVENT REPORT

GC Forum: Building a Case for the CLO of the Future

A summary of the Forum's content sessions, including key takeaways, examining the evolving role of General Counsels beyond traditional legal functions and the diverse skill sets and strategic vision required in the modern corporate world.



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Introduction

General Counsels face increasing pressure. They must manage evolving data privacy laws, ever-present cybersecurity threats, and the disruptive impact of generative AI. Tasked with controlling costs and boosting operational efficiency in an environment of increasing outside counsel billing rates, GCs balance the imperative to be a collaborative partner to other business leaders with their responsibility as the ultimate guardian of corporate integrity.

But this is also a moment of extraordinary opportunity. By building on best practices from high-performing legal departments and embracing innovation, in-house leaders can improve their effectiveness and forge more productive relationships with external counsel. The GC Forum was convened to help participants seize these opportunities by expanding their support network of like-minded industry colleagues.



The CEO Perspective: Growing the CEO/General Counsel Relationship



Shyam Reddy is
President and CEO of
BlueLinx Corporation.



Stephanie Stuckey
is CEO of Stuckey's
Corporation.



Matt Bronfman is
CEO of Jamestown.



Simon Malko is the
Managing Partner of
Morris, Manning & Martin.

The panelists shared their cross-cutting perspectives as former practicing lawyers turned CEOs, advising the audience on how to partner effectively with business leaders and shift into business roles themselves.

They emphasized the importance of learning from failures, unanimously concluding that they would not change their careers in retrospect because past mistakes had taught them invaluable lessons. Shyam Reddy spoke of the need to create an empathetic culture that embraces failure and supports team members when mistakes happen. Stephanie Stuckey encouraged leaders to reframe self-doubt as a strength: a (healthy) level of self-doubt is indicative of a thoughtful and risk-aware approach. Matt Bronfman observed that too many people wait for an “engraved invitation,” noting that the key to his movement between several functions at Jamestown—prior to becoming CEO—was a willingness to raise his hand to solve a problem.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The most effective in-house counsel brings a “*jack of all trades*” mentality: take a comprehensive view of risks and train yourself to speak thoughtfully on issues not squarely within your expertise.
- The *active listening skills* deployed by lawyers to build trust are essential for leadership success in both legal and business roles.
- *Do not wait for an invitation*: volunteer to fill the need when you see an opportunity to contribute to an adjacent area where you may lack traditional qualifications.

Outside Counsel Unlocked: Maximizing Value and Performance



Meredith Lackey is
Chief Compliance Officer
at Southern Company.



David Quillian is
Chief Legal Officer at
PrimeRevenue, Inc.



Ariel Zion is
Chief Legal Officer
at Insight Global.



Christina Graham is
a Partner at Morris,
Manning & Martin.

The panelists explained how they manage relationships with outside counsel, sharing best practices for ensuring that their companies receive quality work while also controlling costs.

They agreed that regular internal reviews of outside counsel provide a valuable structure for comparing levels of service and ensuring prompt action in the face of unsatisfactory performance. Meredith Lackey recommended educating the company's internal clients about the costs of the external legal services they consume to help them be more effective consumers. Ariel Zion observed that the best outside counsel will proactively draw their client's attention to developments that will result in cost increases, enabling in-house counsel to manage their finance team's expectations before a big bill arrives. David Quillian noted that his greatest pet peeve is receiving work from outside counsel that is not at least as good as he could do himself. In those instances, he provides clear feedback and asks that a different lawyer be assigned to the matter.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *Personal relationships* are critical: businesses don't do business with businesses—people do business with people.
- For outside counsel to succeed, they must both *understand the client's business and model the client's culture*.
- Clients must *set expectations upfront and provide timely feedback* to the relationship partner when expectations aren't met, enabling quick remedial measures.

Creative Strategies for Legal Teams: Driving Innovation and Success



Bryan Stillwagon is Chief Legal Officer and Corporate Secretary at Unifi Aviation.



Tricia Kinney is General Counsel and Corporate Secretary at BlueLinX Corporation.



Ashoo Sharma is General Counsel at HomeServices of America in the Georgia and Alabama regions.



Peter "Bo" Rutledge is Senior Counsel at Morris, Manning & Martin.

The panelists began by discussing their efforts to more effectively leverage data in their organizations, noting the adage that what gets measured gets improved.

Bryan Stillwagon described how he integrated insights from a model initially developed by Unifi's safety team—he trained the model on the company's historical EEOC data and redeployed HR resources to sites that the model identified as higher risk. Tricia Kinney warned leaders not to expect AI to make a major immediate impact: you must first invest in training. The best choice is a proprietary model, which will be more secure and better tailored to your data and needs. Ashoo Sharma emphasized the importance of legal department leaders making time to contribute visibly to the broader business. Those investments build trust, later enabling the General Counsel to implement legal goals with more internal credibility.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Data is critical to business success. In-house legal departments must seek every opportunity to *use data to understand the business and quantify risks*.
- With the arrival of AI, law firms cannot afford to replicate their historical resistance to innovation: *clients expect firms to invest in AI tools and adjust their billing practices to align with new technological realities*.
- External counsel must truly know their clients, striving to *understand the client's risk tolerance* as intuitively as the in-house legal team does.

Keynote: An Interview with Peter Carter



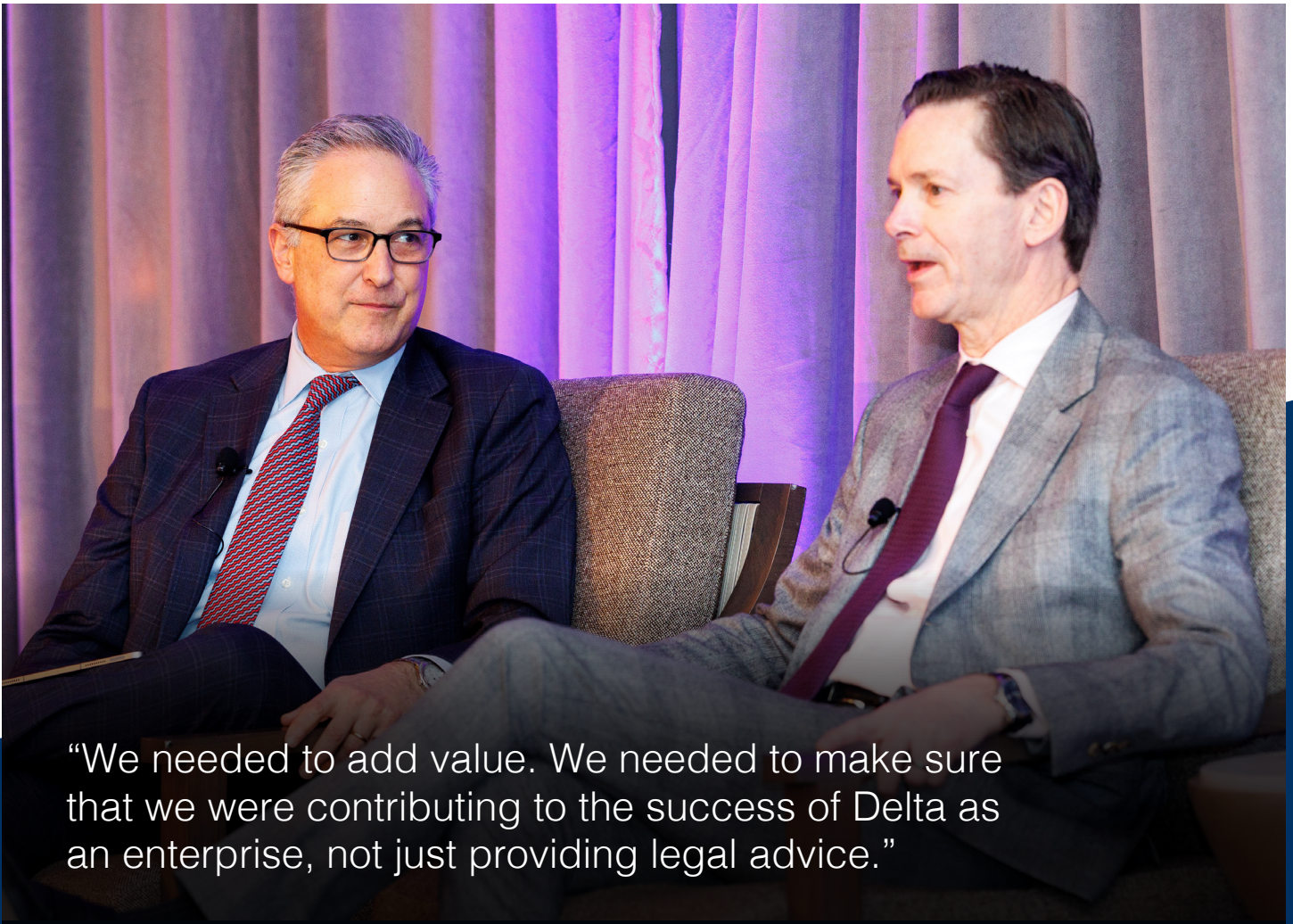
Peter Carter is the Chief External Affairs Officer at Delta Air Lines. He oversees Delta's international, legal, regulatory, government affairs, sustainability, and DEI teams worldwide. Peter exemplifies the value legal leaders can bring to complex organizations through his close working relationship with Delta's CEO, Ed Bastian, and the company's C-suite.



David Rubinger is Market President and Publisher at Atlanta Business Chronicle.

Carter shared insights from his long career as a trial lawyer, law firm leader, and Delta executive.

He emphasized the importance of culture, advising lawyers looking to go in-house to prioritize cultural fit above all else. He encouraged in-house lawyers to trust in their skills as storytellers, communicators, and project managers, noting that legal training prepares attorneys to take a broader role in a corporate setting than they might initially expect. Carter described the challenges Delta faced during the pandemic and how that period of existential threat created opportunities for him to lead projects beyond the legal department. He spoke about his relationships with Delta CEO Ed Bastian and other members of the C-suite, explaining how those bonds were forged in the foxhole of the pandemic. Carter also described how Delta is approaching the opportunities and risks of AI, balancing an embrace of innovation with the imperative to institute appropriate governance processes.



“We needed to add value. We needed to make sure that we were contributing to the success of Delta as an enterprise, not just providing legal advice.”

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- An effective in-house lawyer goes beyond providing legal advice—you must be *a true partner and counselor to the business*.
- Whatever issues are core to your business, it is incumbent upon you to tell that story to external stakeholders and *advocate for the company*.
- Generating ideas is not enough: you must *be an influencer* and help the organization execute.



The GC Forum highlighted the importance of fostering a culture of honesty and accountability, committing to continuous learning, and embracing failure as a learning opportunity. Panelists and keynote speakers emphasized that the legal landscape is constantly evolving, requiring General Counsels and their teams to stay curious, adaptable, and open to new knowledge.

They also reinforced that mistakes are inevitable—but by owning them and ensuring they aren't repeated, leaders can build trust and credibility within their organizations. This forum served as a powerful reminder that growth and innovation come from taking risks, acknowledging challenges, and never stopping the pursuit of learning.

To stay informed about future opportunities, be sure to [sign up](#) for our mailing list. Join MMM and GC Forum co-hosts, Atlanta Business Chronicle and the Association of Corporate Counsel Georgia, for the Corporate Counsel Awards—and beyond. Keep the conversation going with our new quarterly roundtables, designed to keep you connected, informed, and engaged with your legal community peers.



CC FORUM

BUILDING A CASE FOR
THE CLO OF THE FUTURE

JANUARY 16TH
THE THOMPSON
HOTEL - BUCKHEAD



ATLANTA
BUSINESS CHRONICLE