



A New Year of Learning: 17 Topics to Explore in 2017

Technology, Privacy, and eCommerce



Writing the weekly *ACC Docket* column has been an incredibly rewarding experience in many ways. One of the most rewarding aspects is that it encourages us to "learn on steroids," and explore uncharted territories. The brilliant in-house attorneys and other professionals we interview open our minds through their candid lessons on a wide range of exciting topics. We're determined to make 2017 a year of gaining even more knowledge, so we have compiled a list of 17 topics for us to learn more about in the new year.

1. Drones

Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), more commonly known as drones, are levitating, mesmerizing marvels of the 21st century. They can be used for a variety of purposes, from documenting the aftermath of disasters to delivering packages. But they also raise many issues, such as air safety and privacy. We are eager to learn more about these risks and how to mitigate them.

2. Virtual reality

While we still prefer reality to the virtual world, we find virtual reality (VR) fascinating. Discussing real legal rights in the virtual world, as well as virtual rights in the real world, seems like an endlessly engaging conversation.

3. Machine learning and artificial intelligence

Machine learning and artificial intelligence may soon transform legal practice into a less stressful, more strategic business unit. We want to know how sophisticated in-house counsel are planning to get there sooner.

4. Teaching

Teaching has the potential to transform and enhance one's in-house legal practice. We'd like to delve into this possibility further. How can an in-house attorney secure a teaching gig at a law school, or another establishment, such as a business school? What should an in-house attorney consider before embarking on this journey?

5. Improv, theatrics, and public speaking

Sometimes running a legal department feels like a never-ending improv routine. After all, we know that the drama of law extends well beyond the courtroom. As in-house attorneys, we're constantly on our toes and juggling other players — fellow attorneys, clients, and even the industry itself. We suspect that we can learn a thing or two about handling ourselves on the legal stage from our more theatrically inclined colleagues.

6. Accounting, financial statements, and other math-based adventures

There's an old joke that only those who are "bad at math" go to law school, and some may argue that it's based in reality. Many attorneys tend to shy away from all math-based topics. Accounting, however, is an essential language of business. Accordingly, every in-house attorney should highly consider mastering basic accounting. But where does one begin? And what are the most important concepts for every in-house attorney to understand?

7. Lawyers on boards

In-house attorneys, especially those who are closely aligned with businesses, are uniquely positioned to serve on private and public boards. We'd like to explore how — and why — more in-house attorneys should pursue this venture. How can an in-house attorney start the process and secure her first board appointment?

8. Cybersecurity

Cybersecurity issues have been prominent for a while and have become even more fascinating with age. At this time, we are particularly interested in learning more about working with law enforcement, such as the FBI, to prevent and minimize the impact of cyber-attacks.

9. Space

Our fascination with outer space has remained strong. Although diving into the possible risks of visiting the Moon may be premature, now is a good time to explore how space travel will transform the state of technology. We are also interested in what every lawyer can do now to be more helpful to rocket scientists.

10. Self-driving (autonomous) vehicles

Self-driving vehicles are here — the question is whether cities are ready for them. We are eager to explore how in-house attorneys can help cities get ready for the advent of self-driving vehicles. We're also interested in the role of attorneys lobbying for the adoption of this cutting edge technology.

11. Writing books

Many attorneys are closet writers. We know that we've certainly caught the publishing bug! We want to learn from in-house attorneys who have published fiction and nonfiction books. How does one even write a book? We suspect it happens one word at a time; however, we want to hear more about the entire writing process.

12. Lawyers in politics

Someone once told us that going to law school implicitly and inherently should make one comfortable with a political life. Diving into politics, however, is still a daunting idea for many lawyers. How can an in-house attorney get ready to serve on various local and state boards — or even run for public office?

13. Remote general counsel

Attorneys who work remotely are becoming increasingly prevalent. A good number of in-house attorneys are beginning to emphasize their remote work, often opting into an exclusively remote career. We would like to explore this phenomenon. What are strategies for attorneys to be more effective while working remotely? And how does an in-house attorney find a remote general counsel gig?

14. Legal operations

Operations teams are becoming an indispensable part of a well-run, sophisticated legal department. Creating one, however, is no small task. How can an in-house attorney build an effective legal operations team? What are the benefits and costs?

15. Entrepreneurship

In-house attorneys occasionally migrate to the entrepreneurship side of business. Many in-house attorneys possess business savvy in addition to legal skills, so crossing industry barriers is often a realistic career choice. However, crossing over into entrepreneurship can be overwhelming. How does one go about building a non-legal product? And how do inherently risk-averse attorneys choose to become more entrepreneurial?

16. Venture capital (VC) and angel investment

Many in-house attorneys, especially those in tech and startup law, are familiar with the world of VCs and angel investment. This is another area where lawyers could excel at crossing over. How can an in-house counsel role help an attorney get involved in venture capital or angel investment? How do the venture capital and angel investment experiences enrich one's in-house legal practice?

17. Podcasts

Some in-house attorneys channel their creativity through podcasts, which are a favorite medium of entertainment for many commuters. We would like to investigate how one can get started with this creative outlet. What is the quickest way to set up a podcast, build an audience, and develop a unique voice?

This is a long list, but we're determined to learn more about each of these topics. Therefore, we are seeking nominations for members of the in-house community who can help us reach this goal. If you or someone you know can expand our knowledge on any of these topics, please email us or connect with us on social media. In turn, of course, we will share all our learnings with our loyal readers and followers. Here's to a new year of learning and please share what topics you want to learn more about in 2017 using #17in2017!

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Olga V. Mack is a fellow at CodeX, The Stanford Center for Legal Informatics, and a Generative AI Editor at law.MIT. Mack shares her views in her columns on ACC Docket, Newsweek, Bloomberg, VentureBeat, Above the Law, and many other publications.

Mack is also an award-winning (such as the prestigious ACC 2018 Top 10 30-Somethings and ABA 2022 Women of Legal Tech) general counsel, operations professional, startup advisor, public speaker, adjunct professor, and entrepreneur. She co-founded SunLaw, an organization dedicated to preparing women in-house attorneys to become general counsels and legal leaders, and WISE to help female law firm partners become rainmakers.

She has authored numerous books, including Get on Board: Earning Your Ticket to a Corporate Board Seat, Fundamentals of Smart Contract Security and Blockchain Value: Transforming Business Models, Society, and Communities. She is working on her next books: Visual IQ for Lawyers (ABA 2024), The Rise of Product Lawyers: An Analytical Framework to Systematically Advise Your Clients Throughout the Product Lifecycle (Globe Law and Business 2024), and Legal Operations in the Age of AI and Data (Globe Law and Business 2024).

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