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ACC Canada Chapter Spotlight

Community

Interviews and Profiles





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DOW CHEMICAL COMPANY

ACC ALBERTA



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HYDRO ONE NETWORKS, INC.

ACC ONTARIO

What challenges are you facing in your current roles, and how are you addressing them?

O'Reilly: There are too many challenges to name, but we do have a number of transactions going on at the same time; there are regulatory changes that are creating compliance requirements, as well as ongoing issues related to managing outcomes tied to the COVID pandemic (both internally and with counterparties).

Dhawan: In my role, I need to understand our business and keep abreast of all developments that affect the corporation's business. I need to know my resources to obtaining information and expert knowledge. In reality, the product or service our organization offers is electricity, which is really part of a mature industry. However, with technological advancements such as battery storage, even this mature industry is transforming. Therefore, I need to be aware of industry issues.

How did you come to your positions and what advice do you have for in-house counsel looking for new opportunities?

O'Reilly: I had the pleasure of joining Dow after spending five years with another public company in the role of general counsel. Prior to that, I built the law department of a large oil and gas company, having been recruited there from private practice for the purpose of internalizing their mergers and

acquisitions legal needs.

My advice to in-house counsel looking to either advance within their organization or through a lateral change to another organization is to always keep improving and be focused on how to best understand their client's business. Intimate work with clients within the organization and staying on top of changes in risk and market matters will ensure that you have the most relevant experience for a new opportunity. ACC does a great job in this area, helping in-house counsel through focused education opportunities.

Dhawan: I initially came to this position to work on transactions and expanded and adjusted my practice areas based on the needs of my organization. My suggestion to in-house counsel looking for new opportunities is to be receptive to taking on new responsibilities and areas of practice. Take on a new area of practice or project and work hard to learn the legal aspects well. Soon you will become very good at it. You are always more persuasive when you can make well-reasoned, intellectual legal arguments instead of underpinning your argument on tactical grounds.

What are some skills that the next generation of in-house counsel need to hone in order to be successful?

O'Reilly: Interpersonal skills are so important, as is understanding how to best present a complex issue to a client in a clear and straightforward manner. The client wants to know if there is an opportunity to succeed in the issue they are facing. No client wants problems without solutions, so find the solution and present it as concisely as possible. If no solution is possible, at least provide the reasons why, as well as what potential alternatives. Developing emotional intelligence and understanding office politics will help you successfully avoid — or deftly manage — troublesome issues that may arise while being embedded with the client.

Dhawan: In-house counsel will need to be solution-oriented and possess strong business acumen. To be effective, in-house counsel must be able to quickly synthesize large amounts of information and organize it into succinct, clear thoughts, incorporating legal and business advice. To be successful in your role as in-house counsel, the next generation will need to recognize that the practice of law is both an art and a science; that is, you need to not only understand the law but you need to be able to package it and deliver it to your clients. How you package that information sometimes is an art because you need to persuade some very smart businesspeople around the table. This is really a craft because you need to develop the tools that help you do your job effectively, such as earning the trust of your client groups.

How did you first become involved with ACC, and what made you interested in taking on a role within chapter leadership? Further, how has your involvement helped your career?

O'Reilly: I was introduced to the Association of Corporate Counsel by another general counsel in Alberta. His invitation to participate in founding the Alberta chapter led to my continued involvement as a member of the executive and board for the last eight years. My position has allowed me to participate in global ACC initiatives, and to be proactive in local programming and networking opportunities. I took on a leadership role because I was excited about the opportunity to grow a new ACC chapter, and to bring in-house counsel together through a positive interaction organization. I cannot say that my involvement with the ACC has helped my career directly, but it has given me

tremendous insights, which have allowed me to raise the bar in my practice, both on substantive law-side matters and on law department management issues.

Dhawan: I became involved with ACC Ontario when ACC was thinking about expanding into Canada. I was part of the original working group that helped launch the first chapter in Canada. Given that the role of in-house counsel in Canada was expanding, this was an opportunity to help organize and bring the in-house legal community together for a common purpose. Being part of ACC has helped me develop my leadership and organizational skills. I have learned so much!

How does your chapter promote meaningful connections and provide value to its members?

O'Reilly: In addition to providing excellent local programming and networking opportunities, our chapter provides an Alberta LinkedIn page for further discussion, and the chapter communicates with its membership about opportunities to connect.

Value is very individual for each member: Some members find the online resource is to be of tremendous benefit, while others will find the Annual Meeting to be their reason for membership. For the most part, finding value within ACC is “what you make it.” Further, member-only activities and incentives provide that extra bit of value for those looking for exclusivity.

Dhawan: Our chapter is really focused on building an in-house legal community. This means creating opportunities where corporate counsel can come together, including holding events that are focused on learning new skills as well as social interaction. We believe that we can learn from each other and sharing knowledge enriches us all. We also look for ways that our chapter and members can become involved with other parts of the legal community, whether it be for professional development or social causes.

How should members go about becoming more involved with the chapter and ACC in general?

O'Reilly: The easiest way for a perspective member to become involved is to reach out to our chapter director or go through our webpage and connect with our leadership team directly. We would identify how best to align a member's interests with the opportunities available within the chapter, which could be through committee or board work. Members can help with program development, sponsor engagement, and new member initiatives, as well as participate in formal and social interactions with other in-house counsel.

Dhawan: It's really quite simple and begins with showing you're interested and willing to contribute. We realize that everyone has different competing priorities. So, you can spend as much as you are able and your time permits. We believe everyone has something to contribute and are always looking for speakers and roundtable participants. If you are looking to help behind the scenes, we have opportunities where you can help develop programs and events, or write for a newsletter.

Would you say that the connections you've made through ACC have contributed to you becoming a “better” lawyer? If so, how?

O'Reilly: Yes, the connections I have made through ACC have contributed to me becoming a better

lawyer. This is because of learnings from amazing practitioners from around the world, great local and global educational offerings such as through the ACC Annual Meeting, and through generous time spent with ACC leadership who have opened my eyes too how to better serve our clients and the in-house counsel community. Formal learning, and informal discussions with more experienced counsel have also given me insights that I could not have found on my own here in Calgary. What is relevant globally is certainly relevant locally.

Dhawan: There is no doubt that the ACC has opened new opportunities for me that have made me a better lawyer. I have learned so much from ACC's programming. I have a better command of a broad range of issues and that has made me a better lawyer. ACC is all about collaboration and learning from your peers. Further, ACC is such a large organization, that you can pick and choose what areas you want to learn more about — it's all there.

Why should in-house counsel in Canada join ACC, and for those members who have yet to become active in their local chapter, why should they?

O'Reilly: In-house counsel in Canada should join ACC for a number of reasons. First and foremost is the tremendous amount of resources available online that will assist them in research, as well as access to practical information which allows them to not have to reinvent the wheel at their own organization. This is especially true for lawyers in small or solo legal department. Second is the opportunity to participate in networking activities with other in-house counsel, utilizing organizational educational information from committees or topic-specific presentations and groups, which will only better their practice. ACC is focused on in-house solutions and information made for in-house lawyers by in-house lawyers; most all of this practical information is not available from external counsel or other sources (and certainly not for the same value).

And finally, Canadian in-house counsel should become involved with their ACC local chapter to assist in generating and driving content and interactions that are meaningful to them and relevant to their organizational and professional development needs. In addition, ACC provides great networking opportunities and governance experience through participating on boards and committees, further enhancing an in-house counsel's ability to provide more value to their employer organization.

Dhawan: The organizations we work for mostly operate in a regional or global context. We need to serve our organizations in the best way we can. ACC brings regional and global legal resources directly to in-house counsel in Canada. When you become active in a local chapter, you instantly become part of the larger global community of ACC leaders. ACC is made up of many chapters, but the organization as a whole is larger than the sum of its parts. I can't think of a better organization to join.



Staff

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