

Becoming a Consigliere

BY MIKE EVERS

For readers who didn't attend the recent 45th Annual Corporate Counsel Institute in Chicago, there was a fabulous "career advice" moment you should hear. It came from John Rowe, CEO of Exelon. When asked what he wants from his general counsel, Rowe replied, "I want a wartime consigliere."

No matter your position within a legal department, you should think of yourself as the consigliere to your clients. That means you are loyal and advance your CEO's objectives and vision. It doesn't mean you always say "yes." The lawyers at Exelon are smart, well-credentialed pros who are surely not shy about expressing their opinions. In fact they probably debate issues vigorously. Once a decision is made, however, no CEO wants the lawyer who gets in the way. "Lawyers should want to be useful," Rowe added.

Much of our law school education is about arguing a point or playing devil's advocate. Many lawyers require "un-training" to succeed in-house. We're talking about more than just navigating corporate politics. Rowe's comments are about how attorneys see themselves. CEOs want lawyers to bleed and succeed as part of the business. They don't want more outside counsel who call themselves in-house counsel.