

Show Your Worth

By Mike Evers



FACT: At most companies, in-house counsel are referred to as cost centers.

FACT: Law departments are pyramids that narrow to one GC at the top.

If you find yourself in the middle of a cost-center pyramid and screaming for a new challenge, there is hope. Right now venture capital firms are sitting on a pile of cash that they plan to put to work as startups make a comeback this year. And that means more opportunities for you to enter at the top of the pyramid.

While a fair chunk of GC positions go to outside lawyers who help the founders of startups get financed, there are ways to position yourself for these opportunities. You need to identify companies that can benefit from in-house counsel and then start networking at technology-industry conferences. It also helps to rethink your social and business network so it includes venture capitalists, entrepreneurs and investment bankers.

When you spot an opportunity at a startup, go to the CEO with numbers and a plan. The “I can save you money versus

outside counsel” pitch should be a small part of the equation. It is important, but offering cost savings is far less persuasive than explaining how you will help the company grow.

The key to a successful plan is providing concrete examples of how you can help your new employer make money. Can you lobby at the local, state or federal level to gain favorable treatment for this company? Are there regulatory hurdles you can overcome to facilitate entry into new markets? Can you leverage this entity’s technology through lucrative licensing agreements? Can you introduce your new CEO to decision-makers at other companies?

As a recruiter, I like to perpetuate the perception that the best jobs go unadvertised. Sure, clients ask us to fill important positions that don’t get posted on the ACC’s web site. I’ll let you in on a secret, though. The best of the best jobs are the ones that don’t exist yet. Do you have what it takes to create one? Often all it takes is your ability to transform yourself from a cost center into a business partner who can make an economic difference.

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