

## Top 5 Traits of Great General Counsel From a Legal Recruiter

By Mike Evers

What follows is observational, based on 20+ years recruiting for corporate law departments. In my opinion, here are the Top 5 traits needed to become a great General Counsel:

**1. Calm Confidence.** You have heard the term “Boardroom Presence” as a pre-requisite for success in the C-suite, and this certainly applies to the general counsel. Great GCs show boardroom presence daily and not just four times per year. They are calm, consistent, and confident. The term “never let them see you sweat” should be part of every general counsel job description. While you can be human (see #2 and #4 on this list), emotional outbursts, wavering, or negativity of any kind are to be strictly avoided.

**2. Service Orientation.** You make seven figures. Your team member who works on the shop floor making your company’s product earns \$28 per hour. A great GC does not feel superior to the welder, the sales rep, or the middle manager. You understand that your job starts by understanding the business and ends by supporting what is best for the business. It’s not about you.

**3. Intelligence.** This is the one item on my list that is not a soft skill. It is elitist in that I believe many lawyers are simply not smart enough to become a great GC. A great GC can cut to the chase on complex legal issues, navigate corporate financials, talk strategy with the CEO and McKinsey consultants, and solve puzzles. Ivy League credentials are not required. Either you have the goods or you don’t.

**4. Corporate Instincts.** Everyone hates corporate politics. But a great GC is terrific at it. Mainly this means



exercising the “yes, and” skill taught in improvisation classes. Get on board enthusiastically with what your CEO wants and the corporate strategy of the day. But “yes, and” is not the same as “yes, dear.” You may have to speak truth to power, overcome a rival, or face off with someone who is not supportive of the law department. This is the kind of grown-up stuff that is overplayed on television drama shows. Hopefully the need to exercise that muscle will be rare.

**5. Vision.** I don’t think you need vision to become a GC or last for years as a GC. You can just mind the store well. But a great GC has a vision for what he or she wants the law department to become and how it can help the company or even the community at large. You are someone who seeks out best practices or creates them. You may even be fighting the scourge of the billable hour law firm business model and using your influence to improve the legal profession.

**Mike Evers** recruits attorneys for corporations throughout the United States. Please visit [www.everslegal.com](http://www.everslegal.com) or call 312-399-2322 for more information.