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COLUMNIST

BERNADETTE BAYNIE, *group general counsel, Batelco Group*

Put yourself in the best position possible before you start your role by refreshing ahead of time relevant information on the organisation, which you acquired at the pre-interview stage.

Proving your worth – Part 1

In a two-part series, Bernadette Baynie shares her thoughts on achieving success during the first 90 days as a general counsel.

This article is intended to help you succeed in your first 90 days as a newly appointed General Counsel - irrespective of whether it is your first, or a subsequent GC position. This guide can be applied to a GC role in a large or small organisation - irrespective of the industry and/or location.

Pre: Day 1 – Refreshing Knowledge on the Organisation

After congratulating yourself for being awarded the GC position, your next steps should be focused on carefully preparing for the months and years ahead in your role.

Put yourself in the best position possible before you start your role by refreshing ahead of time relevant information on the organisation, which you acquired at the pre-interview stage. It will help you to draft a vision for your department, a value proposition for your role and a first month work plan. Ask the HR Director (who recruited you) to provide the company strategy and implementation plans, 90 day business divisional work plans; governance frameworks for your executive team and law department and annual budgetary information.

Day 1 – Key people to meet?

Day 1 is the most important day in your role and one that you will remember for some time. As you only get the chance to make a first impression once – make this day (and the week ahead) count. Endeavour to make each introduction and meeting that you have a meaningful, friendly and authentic one. You will gain many valuable “first impressions” about your work colleagues and their work environments. These are usually your finest and most reliable impressions. Subsequent impressions will be colored in somewhat by their views, perspectives and interests.

The key meetings for Day 1 to prepare for involve your CEO and Law Department.

(i) CEO Meeting

The main drivers of your role as a GC are to protect the organisation’s assets from various risks whilst at the same time seeking to maximise as much value from those assets for the benefit of the company and its shareholders. Therefore in your first meeting with your CEO, ask what success would look

like to him/her in your role regarding the fulfilment of such key drivers, both in the short and long term. Such valuable insights will steer you and your team on the right track to success.

Then ascertain his/her:

- short and long term expectations of you and your department;
- views on what is working well and not so well and the recommended areas to resolve. Discuss the quality and turn-around of the legal work produced by your team, their level of competency and performance, the level of reliance on external lawyers, and budgetary expectations;
- top 10 high risk litigation / issues / major projects impacting the organisation for you to focus on;
- immediate key priorities for your role. Share your departmental vision and proposed work plan for the upcoming month and ask for his/her views;
- overall impression of the board members and their key priorities regarding your role; and
- preferred communication style and approach (eg: emails, 1:1 sessions and periodic meetings, etc.)

Capitalise on the valuable outputs that emanate from your above meeting by arranging several follow-up meetings over the upcoming weeks/months. They will provide you a platform to develop your relationship with your CEO. They will assist you to gain his/her level of support and understanding to achieve the key requirements of your role.

(ii) Law Department Meeting

Share a meeting with the whole of your department to introduce yourself. Link in your staff who cannot be physically present by video or conf call. Impart details of your background, experience and areas of expertise. Relate to them your values, priorities, expectations, team approach and the overall future vision of your department. Such a vision could be one that involves “building a cohesive and high caliber team that: (i) is energised, enabling, efficient, ethical, hardworking, creative and responsive; and (ii) strives to delivers excellence to the organisation in all that it undertakes.”