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The Challenges of Being In-House: Building Relationships

Following up on [this blog](#) about the challenges of being in-house and handling your emotional intelligence, here's another excerpt from [this piece](#) that I wrote with Sarah Kalgaard, General Counsel of Vital Images, for the Association of Corporate Counsel - this excerpt is our #1 point, "Building Relationships": With your supervisor: Depending on the law department's structure and your role within it, **it's very possible that your highest priority client is your general counsel or supervising attorney**. Become invaluable to them. Even when you're new, if you can identify portions of projects that you can assist with, offer to work on that piece. Make them look good. Take note of their style and approach, and particularly if you are ghostwriting for them, try to emulate it. Learn about them: How they work, and what their idiosyncrasies are. Often you can talk to others who worked for or with them, and who can give you pointers on how best to work with them. Another good resource is to read any articles they have written, which can provide invaluable insight into their expectations. With the business clients: Your business clients are usually corporate leaders who most often are not lawyers. **Get to know your clients, before any legal issues arise**. Find out who your key internal business contacts will be and schedule meetings with them right away. Ask them questions about how they interact with legal, what issues they commonly run into, and what their strategic priorities are (long term and short term). Ask them about their interests and values and how to best communicate with them. By understanding their key challenges, legal and otherwise, you will be in a better position to provide value to them. As non-lawyers their communication style will be different—and most likely will not be a formal legal memo. Ask questions and more questions. Don't wait. With your colleagues within legal: In addition to your supervisor and clients, get to know peers and colleagues within the department and outside of it. **Build your brand as someone who is helpful, easy to work with, and collegial**. As the benefits show, clients and managers notice – "good work gets more good work." Like any occupation, much of what will make you successful is who you know, and how you can build relationships with them that help you and the organization. With all your relationships, you want to be clear you are there to assist and support them and their success.

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