

# The General Counsel Playbook

How to start and love your new job as an in-house attorney



## INTRODUCTION

When you're hired as a company's first in-house attorney, you're immediately thrust into the chaos. Depending on what you did before this job, you may have been able to focus on one or two areas of expertise. But now, you are all at once the go-to person for everything from employment issues to product licensing, liability questions, and sales contracts. There is certainly a lot to know and it can feel very overwhelming at first.

Having been the first in-house attorney at three companies now, I've been in your shoes before. Each time it's been a messy and chaotic job to jump into, and yet I am still able to emphatically say that I really love what I do.

To help make your transition a bit easier than the lessons I learned through my experiences at multiple companies, I'm thrilled to be able to offer some guidance. This playbook will help you set expectations with leadership, get a fast grip on your organization's current state, gain agreement on the priorities for your legal team, and build a plan to be more efficient and organized while you demonstrate your value to the executive team.

Sounds simple, right? So where and how do you actually start?

Here's my playbook on where a new GC should start. I'm going to skip over the obvious, such as learn the business, and identify other key actions you should take.

I hope you enjoy it.

Jessica Nguyen  
Chief Legal Office, Lexion



# 01 Meet your key stakeholders



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## MEET YOUR KEY STAKEHOLDERS

In many organizations, legal has the reputation of being a bottleneck or a place you go to hear “no.” Or has no reputation at all because the business doesn’t understand how to engage with in-house legal. Many of us have borne the brunt of frustrated sales leaders at the end of a quarter or impatient CFOs looking for a pile of answers about what’s in your contracts. But like all relationships, **much of this comes from poorly set expectations and lack of communication** or context.

**Set-up weekly one-on-one meetings with key stakeholders and attend their monthly or quarterly planning sessions** to learn their priorities and goals. It’s important for you to be able to communicate how legal has contributed to helping them achieve their goals and speak their language.

For Sales, helpful meetings to attend are forecast meetings to see deals in the pipeline. For Product or Engineering, you should attend product roadmap meetings to understand what features will be built.

This will allow you to **be proactive vs. reactive**, get alignment on clarify expectations on deliverables from legal and timing, and allow you to customize metrics and reports of the legal team’s activities in a way that makes sense to these internal clients.

Here are a few ideas of what the different teams might need your help with:

**You will likely report to either the CEO or CFO.**

Not only do you need to understand how to meet their expectations as an employee, but you will also need to respond quickly to requests for reporting on everything from contract values to cancellation dates.

**Your sales team will be making a lot of work for you as they move full speed ahead toward the company's revenue goals.**

Oftentimes, that translates to an enormous task list for you at the end of any given month or fiscal quarter that includes things like prioritizing the deals that are forecasted to close that period, managing redlines and signatures, tracking any negotiated obligations, and filing the executed contracts away.

**HR will have many types of employment issues they're going to need your help with.**

That might be informing them of rapidly changing employment laws, signing NDAs with candidates, signing employment contracts and mitigating the risks of disgruntled employees.

**Marketing often invests a lot of money into the business which translates to lots of SOWs, MSAs, and vendor contracts to review, redline, and execute.**

In addition there are privacy laws marketing needs to adhere to as well as policies and terms of use that will need to be kept up to date on the website.

# 02 Understand the industry and business jargon

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# 02

## UNDERSTAND THE INDUSTRY AND AND BUSINESS JARGON

If you don't already know everything about your industry (including the competitive landscape), business jargon, company metrics, and how to read financial statements, learn it.

You need to understand and be well versed in various business metrics for finance, sales, marketing, etc.

You can help. **You're a key partner to all of these functions.**

Partner with sales to better forecast revenue and scale the contracting process. Partner closely with finance to develop a strategy to predict revenue, track vendor expenses, and manage cash flow. Partner with marketing to create a live report of customer logos you can use for marketing collateral.

Here's a quick start list of reports you can easily create and save in Lexion to help your business save money and drive growth.

### Average Time by Stage

When a contract is being negotiated, the business assumes it's with internal legal review and legal is what's slowing down the process. Often, that's simply not the case. The case is normally that the contract is under counterparty review or awaiting internal approval.

With Lexion, you can create a custom report that shows the average time under each stage (e.g. legal review vs. business review vs. counterparty review) by project type.

### New Vendors - Signed up the Last 7 Days

"Surprise, we signed up a new vendor we didn't tell you about and we need to pay them ASAP" is not what finance teams enjoy hearing when a vendor is not set up to be paid. But it happens. All the time.

With Lexion, you can set up a report of recently signed up vendors that's emailed to your Finance team each week so they can set them up as a vendor to be paid.

### Material Vendors - Upcoming Renewals/ Expirations and Renewal Cancellation Deadlines

Nobody is thrilled about paying for a service they don't use or didn't budget for. To prevent an unexpected vendor auto-renewal or big price increase on renewal, ask Accounting for a list of your top vendors by a certain spend threshold, then create a new report in Lexion that's sent each month to the relevant departments and business owner.

In addition to this report, [you should also consider setting a custom alert 60 or 90 days before a deadline to stop autorenewal or an expiration date](#) to have an internal business discussion about next steps with the vendor.

# 03 Capture metrics and establish reporting

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## CAPTURE METRICS AND ESTABLISH REPORTING

All C-level executives and the board are metrics-focused. Other than our past law firm lives of billing our time in 6-minute increments, most lawyers are not. **Don't be like most lawyers. Be strategic, data-driven, and solution-oriented.**

Because of your function, you're viewed as the cost center and barrier to closing a deal. It's not personal. It's about the function and not the individual. To counter or shift these misperceptions, **show-up to the table armed with data.** Most departments have KPIs, OKRs, or other metrics they regularly review and report on—legal should be no different.

But for any of these goal setting systems to work, you need a **practice of capturing metrics and reporting** on them. It doesn't have to be complex, you can use a spreadsheet.

Lexion can help make this process efficient when you're ready to move beyond the spreadsheet.

# 04 Establish or streamline processes

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# 04

## ESTABLISH OR STREAMLINE PROCESSES

Is your team working out of email inboxes and handling all requests over email and Slack? Are you getting asked about the status of a project, and then following up by email or Slack to collate these?

While this process is adequate when volume is low and manageable, it does not scale and it's not sustainable. And **this process breaks when volume grows, there's turnover, or someone is out of the office**. But it's also very common. Even at what you'd think are mature companies.

**At a minimum, create an intake process, SLAs for certain types of requests, and playbooks to educate and allow high users of legal to self-serve and reduce requests to legal.**

We built Lexion Workflow to make this super easy for you and your team. All they have to do to get the ball rolling is to send an email that initiates a task in Lexion. The business stays where they are when engaging with legal, and you get a better way to manage and report on projects.

**With Lexion Workflow, you're also able to create custom intake forms and custom reports that show the volume of work** by intake type, first-party vs. third-party paper, contract value, time at each stage (legal review vs. counterparty review), and more.

Everyone wins. Collaboration processes improve and accelerate, and data is accessible to legal.

# 05 Get your contracts under control



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## GET YOUR CONTRACTS UNDER CONTROL

**Most GCs are not successfully set-up** to answer the questions: “Last quarter, how many contracts were entered into on third-party paper?” or “Broken down by department, which vendor contracts auto-renew and are up for renewal the next quarter?”

But GCs are expected to know this. We’re expected to be contract experts. Even for the hundreds or thousands of contracts that were signed before the GC started and are now a hot mess.

**Take advantage of this time you’re “ramping” to get a handle on the contract situation.** When times are good, your time will be sucked up by revenue-generating projects (e.g., sales). **First, find out where your contracts live and how they are organized** (hint: they’re probably not in a consistent and easy-to-find way). Then, establish a process of capturing what’s in your contracts. Most contract management systems don’t help you to organize your legacy contracts (a huge pain point). Lexion does with the power of our AI.

Am I harping on data again? Yes, and you’ll continue to hear this from me because **businesses now expect legal teams to be data-driven.** Until you have a tool like Lexion that can automate this tracking and reporting process, a spreadsheet is your friend.

# 06 Learn what matters most to the CEO & Board



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## LEARN WHAT MATTERS MOST TO THE CEO AND BOARD

Ideally, you report to the CEO and learn first-hand the CEO's core values and priorities. The CEO brought you here to get a job done and solve a pain point, so **understanding how the CEO defines success for your role and how that translates to business value will ensure that you are aligned on key priorities** from day one. Legal has a unique role of interacting and partnering with all parts of the business to support their respective goals.

Legal is a function that's intended to not operate in a silo. **The success of the company is the success of the legal team. That's the key metric the GC cares about.** This differentiator allows you to share a neutral perspective with the CEO and Board, and be a voice of reason.

In addition to your communications with company leaders, other indicators of company priorities (and in turn what matters to the CEO and Board) include the CEO's professional background (because people value what they truly understand and this also tells you how they communicate), the organization and reporting structure, where company funds are invested, the metrics the board is focused on during board meetings, and the allocation of headcount at the company.

# 07 Join a GC community



# 07

## JOIN A GC COMMUNITY

Being a GC is hard. Good news – **you're not alone**. There are amazing communities out there to support and help you.

Members of GC communities are generous with their knowledge and lessons. A few GC communities I enjoy are [TechGC](#), the [Association of Corporate Counsel](#), and the [Women's General Counsel Network](#) founded by [Jan Kang](#).

These communities provide templates on contracts and policies, and the GCs that are a part of these networks openly share information, offer referrals, and provide a great benchmark regarding what your peers are doing on issues we're all encountering.

I know because I have asked for help, and received help.

# 08 Network with other GCs on LinkedIn

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# 08

## NETWORK WITH OTHER GCS

Network with other GCs (and me!) on LinkedIn.

We're all in this together. I've found the greatest source of information when I'm stuck or have a general question is right within my personal network on LinkedIn. I guarantee **there's another GC out there in the trenches who has faced off whatever problem you're dealing with** and who might have a few ideas and shortcuts to share.

In fact, **start with me if you have a question!** I love talking to other in-house attorneys and am happy to share any knowledge (or mistakes) I can with you. If I can't help you I'm sure I'll have someone in my network who has the answers you need.

Connect with me on LinkedIn and send me a message saying you saw the invitation to connect in this ebook.

## CONCLUSION

It's really **hard to win hearts and minds and get business support without data** to help you tell a story. Invest now in scaling your operations, including how you gather and report on what the legal team does, a tool to measure how long it takes to complete a project, and what's in your contracts, so it hurts less later (a lot less). Long and short term, time and money will be saved.

**If you get one thing and one thing only from this playbook, it should be this lesson: Be a data-driven GC.**

Honestly, I wish I executed my playbook more successfully in my previous in-house roles. This wish has inspired Lexion's mission to be the hub for the data-driven legal team. Learn from my experiences and do it better.

Oh, and have fun! Leading and building an in-house legal team can be one of the most rewarding jobs you've ever had.



**"It is not a job for the faint of heart,  
but a lot of fun for the right person."**

**Jessica Nguyen, Chief Legal Officer at Lexion**

## ABOUT LEXION

Lexion is an incredibly easy-to-use contract management system. We're on a mission to make legal teams highly productive and happy, by accelerating contract review and eliminating busywork through automation and AI. We use best in class natural language processing technologies to make it 100 times easier for legal teams to find what's in their contracts and automatically stay organized.

Best of all, Lexion's email-centric approach, and legacy contract onboarding, makes implementation and adoption easy. We built Lexion at Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen's artificial intelligence research institute (AI2) and are backed by the same investors that funded OpenAI (Khosla Ventures), helped launch Amazon (Madrona Venture Group), and have advised Google (Wilson Sonsini). With a top notch and experienced team from Microsoft, Facebook, Google, and Amazon, we built a company that CB Insights ranked the #1 most promising AI legal tech startup in the world two years in a row (2020, 2021). Lexion is a Top 40 Intelligent Application based on votes from Goldman Sachs, Madrona, Khosla Ventures, Andreessen Horowitz, Sequoia Capital, and many of the top AI investors in the world.

Most importantly, fantastic brands trust Lexion to manage their contracts: Outreach, OfferUp, Blue Nile, Brooks, and many more.

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Want to quickly uplevel your contract process?  
Lexion is here to help. [Sign up for a demo.](#)

Learn more about Lexion