
A Continuing Conversation with Leaders from the Legal Industry



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Francis Drelling is General Counsel of Specialty Restaurants Corporation, a premiere source for events, weddings and restaurants with breathtaking views. Francis oversees the company's litigation, employment, real property, compliance and corporate governance matters, among other things. Francis frequently authors articles on various aspects of the legal industry.

Q: *What about your job and/or day-to-day activities do you think outside counsel should know that would better enable them to serve your needs?*

A: Generally speaking, in-house lawyers are part of a team and often have to build support for their initiatives. This means having to motivate others to assist when they have other things to do and when they are focused on their own priorities.

As for myself specifically, I am responsible for multiple, and extremely varied, matters every day. For example, on any given day, I may be asked: What are the meal/rest period rules in these circumstances? What notice must be given to an employee who is about to be separated in this or that state? Is the brand protected (intellectual property) given what just took place? What are our obligations under the ADA or similar state statutes? How do we respond to this union-related issue? What are the uniform rules on that point? What provisions can we lawfully include in this agreement? Does this contract need any changes? Do we need a new policy on that issue? Well, that about wraps up the morning – if you see my gist. Time is crunched, and each minute can be dramatically different from the last.

Q: *What are your expectations for outside counsel who represent your company?*

A: Not only does outside counsel have to be skilled and knowledgeable, they also have to be budget-oriented. To that end, I expect cost effective solutions. Additionally, I look for outside counsel to be driven and take ownership of problems. I'm hiring them to help me solve problems, not simply take orders. I also need lawyers who are good communicators. I actually enjoy speaking with lawyers who are able to articulate complex issues in a simple and efficient manner. Finally, counsel need to be readily available when we need them. My boss expects availability from me, and I, in turn, expect the same from our outside counsel.

Q: *You mentioned that you expect outside counsel to be good communicators. In what ways can outside counsel communicate effectively for you?*

A: First and foremost, and due to the press of business, I prefer to get quick calls on core issues. I need to move things quickly so I can get on to other issues. E-mail exchanges often take too long. I prefer that they just call so we can resolve the issue at hand, then they can follow up with a confirming e-mail or letter. Also, outside attorneys who take the time to provide unsolicited updates on new laws that specifically affect our business are absolutely invaluable to me.

What are some reasons why you have terminated relationships with outside counsel?

A: We've terminated outside counsel for lack of attention to our needs. As I noted earlier, when we have an issue, we need it addressed. That means we need lawyers who pick up the phone when we call. Also, we've had to part ways with outside counsel over costs. In some cases we parted because their hourly rates were just too high. In other cases, we parted due to their continuous inability to understand that their hourly rate was of little value if they could not stay on budget. Then, of course, there was the one counsel that actually thought I should not care if his legal mistake cost our company more money. Obviously, that incident just keeps on giving me good memories.

Q: *In what ways has outside counsel provided you with exceptional service?*

A: I have been fortunate to have outside counsel who are willing to work nights and weekends and otherwise make themselves available when I need them. That's a huge benefit. I have also had a few outside counsel that routinely provide guidance on issues unrelated to files they're working on – often at no charge. Also, I've had some outside counsel, at their own initiative, take the time to fly out to our Support Center to get a better understanding of our operations. That impressed a number of my internal business clients.

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