
A Continuing Conversation with Leaders from the Legal Industry



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Miriam serves as Senior Vice President of Operations and Senior Counsel for Seneca One Finance, Inc., a specialty finance company in Bethesda, Maryland. She is responsible for the legal integrity of financial transactions entered into by the Company in twenty-nine states, and she manages the activities of more than a dozen outside counsel across the country.

Q: *Briefly describe your duties and how you use outside counsel to make your job easier. What aspect of your day-to-day activities does outside counsel likely not know, but should?*

A: I work for a specialty finance company and I am responsible for the legal integrity of financial transactions entered into by the company in twenty-nine states. Because each transaction requires court approval, most often in our customer's home state, I partner with local counsel in each of the twenty-nine states in order to accomplish the court approval process. I rely heavily upon outside counsel expertise with respect to local procedures and practices, and I try to select local counsel who have solid working relationships with those who can positively impact the court approval process (court clerks, judicial clerks, etc.). A continuous challenge I face: to impress upon local counsel the urgency of the timeline associated with each transaction. Our transactions are typically relatively small, but each carries with it a commitment that we have made to a customer. I must constantly remind local counsel of the urgency we feel in connection with each transaction - regardless of its size.

Q: In what way(s) do you believe outside counsel, in general, can change to better serve the needs of their clients?

A: Responsiveness is at the top of my list. In today's world of electronic communications, it is so easy for counsel to respond to an email -- if for nothing more than to acknowledge receipt of a communication. Additionally, counsel should periodically engage in a simple "expectations check" by asking the client directly: what is working well? What is NOT working well? How can we adjust to meet client expectations? In the majority of my counsel relationships, I am the one who initiates these conversations. I would feel much more valued as a client if counsel cared enough to initiate this type of discussion.

Q: Describe an instance where outside counsel provided you with exceptional service and explain why the service was exceptional?

A: This should seem obvious, but unfortunately, it felt exceptional: Counsel was planning an extended vacation, and reached out well in advance of her departure to outline a detailed plan for continued provision of services. Every aspect of our relationship was provided for, such as pending matters, future matters, and my potential need for "emergency" assistance. This left me feeling confident that our representation would not skip a beat, and that counsel viewed our relationship with great value.

Another example: when outside counsel takes the time to send me a news article, legislative update, or any other information that may impact our industry. When I receive these communications from the very few who take the time to do it, the communication usually includes a short commentary from counsel re: the potential impact. Again, this leaves me feeling that counsel values the relationship enough to partner with us to prepare for potential impacts.



Q: *Who is your “go-to” lawyer or law firm and why?*

A: Sam Cortes with Fox Rothschild. We began our relationship with the firm by partnering with Sam in one state. Sam's representation was consistently of such high caliber that we offered him the opportunity to coordinate the expansion of the relationship into several additional states. Sam is extremely responsive and respects the "urgency" we feel in connection with each of our transactions. With the recent expansion of our relationship, Sam is actively engaged in every matter the firm handles for us. If I voice concerns, he responds immediately and allows me to be part of planning the solution. As a client, Sam makes us feel extremely valued and confident in the representation the firm provides.

Q: *What steps has your legal department taken to lower your legal expenses (both internal and external), and what actions are you considering to lower expenses in the future?*

A: We audited our relationships and looked for opportunities to identify a few "preferred providers". We selected the firms who provide us the best service, and then checked to see if the firms had established a presence in any other jurisdictions where we require representation. We then offered the firms the opportunity to represent us in additional states, and were able to negotiate more favorable rates based upon the assurance of increased volume. Definitely a win-win situation.

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