GC Perspective After 30 Years at the Same Company

By Big Law Business - Bloomberg Law
March 9, 2018
Even as Joanne Raphael marks her 30th year with PPL Corporation, her tenure with one of the largest investor-owned companies in the U.S. utility sector has been anything but static.

"My time at PPL doesn’t feel like decades. Instead, it feels like I have had multiple, successive, challenging careers that happened to occur within one company," said Raphael, senior vice president, general counsel, and corporate secretary of the Pennsylvania-based energy company for the past three years.

Raphael is equally passionate about cultivating a sense of ownership among her team.

"I readily share information about business priorities and objectives … by understanding how they fit into the larger picture, employees become more engaged," she said.

This year marks your 30th year with PPL—what are the top lessons you’ve learned that have successfully culminated in your current role as GC?

My work has always been about more than just providing a legal answer. I have learned that, to be successful, you have to know the business; invest in and develop people because they make all the difference; add value as a true business partner and trusted counsel; be open to new opportunities; and always continue learning.

I am motivated by a strong desire to contribute and add value to the business. In the legal department, I have worked in a broad range of areas, from corporate governance to complex antitrust litigation, merger and acquisition activities, and federal and state regulatory matters.

In addition to the legal department, my team includes federal government relations, enterprise-wide compliance, corporate communications, sustainability, and philanthropic functions, which are important areas that contribute to the success of the business. These experiences gave me a broader perspective of the company and our sector, which has contributed to my role of general counsel.

How realistic, in this day and age, is it for a young lawyer—seeking a change of pace from law firm life—to expect to transition as you did to a company for 30 years?

Joanne Raphael: Honestly, in today’s workforce, I don’t think many people stay in one
place for 30 years, or should realistically expect to. My time at PPL doesn't feel like
decades. Instead, it feels like I have had multiple, successive, challenging careers that
happened to occur within one company.

PPL's business has evolved substantially during my years with the company. I played a
role as the company navigated through transformative regulatory changes, mergers,
acquisitions, and divestitures. I was given the chance to grow professionally within the
legal department and in other positions, such as environmental, state government
relations, and community affairs.

Similarly, lawyers with an interest in business and law can have long, fulfilling careers as
in-house counsel—whether it’s with one company or several. The key is to remain
challenged and perform at a high level. While the role of in-house counsel is to provide
legal guidance, that shouldn't be a limiting factor to growth. If you don't feel that you are
growing and learning, it might be time to look for the next challenge.

**What are your top priorities as you settle into your third year as GC of one of the
largest investor-owned companies in the U.S. utility sector?**

One of my top priorities continues to be developing my team. I seek to provide
opportunities that empower and challenge our attorneys and legal professionals. I
encourage my team to find innovative ways to tackle issues and to cultivate productive
relationships with business partners to drive best-in-sector operational performance and
deliver industry-leading customer service and reliability.

Another focus area is to continue enhancing our enterprise-wide compliance program. We
have a decentralized business model, with business line leaders responsible for results
from three main segments—Pennsylvania, which is also home to PPL Corporation
headquarters; Kentucky; and the United Kingdom. It is always important to maintain an
effective compliance program, but even more so in a decentralized model.

**How are you structuring your team and accompanying priorities to boost investor
confidence in PPL?**
Investor interest in environmental, social, and governance matters has grown markedly over the past several years. To best respond, we are devoting more resources to this area. My team is committed to going beyond only reporting results to also set goals for the future and help our business partners to achieve those goals.

We remain focused on engaging with our shareowners. My team, which spans corporate governance, compliance, communications, and policy functions, plays an integral role in our shareowner outreach, together with our investor relations and finance groups.

**Can you share a little about PPL’s focus on inclusion and diversity—why is it so important to you personally and where does the effort currently stand?**

PPL is committed to creating a diverse environment where every person is treated with respect and feels comfortable speaking up. No one has a monopoly on good ideas. We will achieve better results when everyone contributes.

We support our commitment to inclusion and diversity in visible ways. Our CEO [William H. Spence] signed the ‘CEO Action for Diversity and Inclusion’ pledge, which challenges us to cultivate a workplace that supports open dialogue on complex—and sometimes difficult—conversations about diversity and inclusion.

I strongly support our legal team’s participation in the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity (LCLD), sending our in-house attorneys through the fellows program and encouraging them to mentor law students.

Personally, I’m proud to lead one of the most diverse teams in our organization. Within our department, we have leaders for many of our affinity groups and an overwhelming feeling of mutual respect.

**How can GCs more effectively inspire their teams—what daily best practices have you found especially helpful in this area?**

I am focused on making myself accessible to my team—whether that’s in group settings or one-on-one discussions. I think communication and a genuine interest in people are essential to maintaining a motivated, high-performing team.
I readily share information about business priorities and objectives and how our work contributes to achieving the company’s goals. By understanding how they fit in to the larger picture, employees become more engaged.

**You place a premium on pushing beyond your comfort zone—similarly, what can we expect next from you and your team, as you further PPL’s standing?**

I see it, I step out of my comfort zone in small ways all the time. It doesn’t always have to be a huge leap to make gains. I will continue to encourage my team, and myself, to have open conversations around inclusion and diversity, as I firmly believe that diversity of thought and background in our workforce is critical to our overall success.

We will continue to stay at the forefront of emerging issues and priorities, like cybersecurity and sustainability, so that our company is positioned for success and our legal team adds bottom-line results to our business.


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