



# HOW IN-HOUSE LAWYERS CAN BECOME INDISPENSABLE

BY SUE-ELLA PRODONOVICH

As an in-house lawyer, your holy grail will always be to earn the trust and respect of the business. And, while part of that will no doubt come from doing good work, it will also partly come down to marketing yourself the right way.

Here are the fundamentals of profile building I think all in-house lawyers need to get right if they want to grow a good reputation in their business.

## Lead

Whether we admit it or not we are [full of biases](#). Now I'm not saying that we're all racist or sexist or whatever. But we do all have certain preferences, one of which tends to be "fundamental attribution error", whereby we place too much emphasis on someone's behaviour and too little emphasis on analysing the thing that can be actually be measured. So, no matter how much you show off your expertise, how good your advice is or how much money you save or make the business, part of how people judge your worth to the business will be based on how you behave. So act honestly, follow through, be consistent and generally do all those things that don't just make you a good employee but also make you look like a good employee. It will go along way to making sure you get noticed.

## Learn

As an in-house lawyer, you'll often be told that one of the most important things you'll need is an **understanding of the business**. And it's true. You need to know about why your employer exists, where they're coming from and what they're hoping to achieve. But I think what's often overlooked is an **understanding of business**.

By this, I don't necessarily mean enrolling in a full MBA or degree in applied finance. But I do think, if you're working in the business world, you should be curious about how client are won, how business is done and the best way of doing it. And I think a bit of formal business theory often doesn't go astray.

Satisfying your curiosity for business may also provide a way to tune out the daily grind. Turn off the mobile and open a business book with fad-free concepts such as [The Innovator's Dilemma](#), [Blue Ocean Strategy](#), [Built To Last](#) or [Better](#).

Tune in to your social media accounts and follow interesting people in business such as your CEO, your businesses most significant or new clients, and your most valuable suppliers.

For something a bit more formal, consider a short course at one of the business schools, such as those offered through [AGSM](#), [MGSM](#) or [Melbourne Business School](#). And, if your employer is paying, why not see if you can convince them to send you to [INSEAD](#) or [Harvard Business School](#).



## Network

The easiest thing in life is to stick to your own. When you work in a large corporate, that can often mean confining yourself socialising with the in-house team. That may seem nice and comfortable but, at best, it can lead to you never meeting and knowing the people you should. At worst, it can lead to an “us and them” mentality, where you’re always opponents rather than colleagues. A lot of marketing is done informally, just in getting to know someone and trust them. So, if you want to ingratiate yourself to the business, start building your [informal networks](#) within it. Why not even kick start things by hosting a seminar and inviting your in-house clients along?

## Communicate

Finally, and most importantly, the best form of reputation building any in-house lawyer can do is to communicate with their business clients on their level. If you can be explaining your advice in their language and framing your opinion in terms they understand they’ll come to see you as an asset to business, not a hindrance to it. Most importantly, that will make your job easier when you do have to stand your ground - which you should at times.

Just as your job isn’t to say ‘no’ to everything, it’s not to say ‘yes’ to everything either.

## And finally...

If you get it right and master reputation side of being an in-house lawyer just as well as the technical side, the sky is the limit. More and more often, lawyers with the right skills are [rising through the ranks](#) of Australia’s large corporates to run the show.

There’s no reason you shouldn’t do the same.

## Want More?

If you’d like to know how to cultivate referrers, email [Sue-Ella](#) or [get in touch](#).



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