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## Building relationships becomes valuable

**B**uilding successful business relationships with in-house counsel oftentimes depends heavily upon individual personalities. Common interests, prior existing friendships, business acquaintances and an understanding of a client's needs are all elements contributing to a potentially long-lasting and mutually beneficial relationship. For associates at law firms, it can seem intimidating or difficult to relate to clients whose in-house lawyers are 10 or 20 years their senior. Younger associates may not have ample opportunities to interact directly with clients and so building any type of relationship can prove challenging.

There are, however, a growing number of younger lawyers serving businesses in-house, particularly in tech and e-commerce sectors. Jeremy H. Gottschalk of Chicago-based Sittercity Inc. is one of them. Gottschalk, 32, has been with Sittercity as its vice president of corporate strategy and general counsel since 2010 and couldn't be happier. By building a relationship with the client's executives, Gottschalk landed what he considers an ideal job for him. Gottschalk recently provided insight in a past column about his transition from life as an associate to that of general counsel of a growing company. He also gave some advice for associates looking to build strong and lasting client relationships and to those who are committed to business development.

### The building blocks

After graduating from Loyola University Chicago School of Law in 2004, Gottschalk's legal career began as an associate at a local Chicago firm, where he was part of a small intellectual property group. After a few years, he lateralled to a large firm in Chicago, where he practiced in the firm's IP transactional group. When that firm was acquired by another global

firm, a philosophy developed emphasizing the cross-selling of institutional talent and skills across and between its offices. The idea, as Gottschalk explained it, was to build firm camaraderie and better serve the firm's clientele by farming out work to where it would be most efficiently done.

In 2009, Gottschalk took advantage of the cross-sell and was hooked up with Sittercity's relationship partner, who was based in the firm's Washington, D.C., office. Sittercity, an Internet-based home, baby sitter and child care service, needed an attorney with a strong e-commerce background, but required more moderate billing rates than the firm's partners could offer. The opportunity to work directly with Sittercity's executives was ideal for Gottschalk. He successfully built a cordial, professional working relationship with the client and in 2010 was hired as Sittercity's general counsel. By cross-selling his talents across the firm, Gottschalk opened the door of opportunity to capitalized on building a personal relationship and ultimately landing a job at one of Chicago's fastest growing companies.

### The transition

Building relationships with clients as an associate is one thing. Moving in-house with your client is quite another. Gottschalk described his transition from life as an associate at a large law firm to that of a manager of Sittercity as nothing shy of shocking. "For people who grew up in large firms," Gottschalk said, "moving in-house is a culture shock. The interactions with people you work with, and the expectations of those interactions, are just different."

Sittercity, however, is somewhat unique as an Internet-based company. "The average age of my colleagues is 20 to 30 years younger than it was at the firm. Management personnel are

### BY JOHN L. LITCHFIELD AND MARTIN J. BISHOP

*John L. Litchfield is an associate and Martin J. Bishop a partner in the litigation department of Foley & Lardner LLP's Chicago office. Bishop is also the vice chairman of Foley's consumer financial services practice.*

in their mid-30s. As a part of this, it's not 'are you smart enough to work for us,' rather it's a bigger stress on whether your personality fits within the structure." Succeeding in-house, Gottschalk emphasized, is so much more about the ability to adjust to working with people who have never dealt with lawyers — and who don't necessarily want to. Still, he knew this before starting with Sittercity because he built professional and personal relationships with the client's executives before going in-house.

### Lessons learned

Knowing what you don't know when going in-house is an important component to success. More important is knowing who you can rely on to get you answers you need to press legal issues. As general counsel, Gottschalk has wide discretion to dish out legal work to people he knows. However, he emphasized that he doesn't give work to just anybody — even those people he has known personally for years. "Some people I know are constantly working on business development," Gottschalk said. Eagerness to learn the business of Sittercity, identifying previously unknown needs of the company, offering services and educational opportunities that in-house counsel do not otherwise have at their disposal: These are all key factors Gottschalk takes into account when selecting outside counsel.

In addition to traditional business development techniques, Gottschalk said funda-

mental skills such as listening to and understanding the needs of his business go a long way in earning his trust and, ultimately, his business. "I'm a lawyer," Gottschalk said. "I understand that there are few clear answers." Still, he expects timely responses to his questions. "I value accuracy," he said, "yet I've noticed that lawyers often confuse responsiveness with having the right answer." Unless it is an extremely specialized area of law, Gottschalk usually only gives work to outside counsel when he's pressed for time. "The pressures inside a company are different than those in a firm. Obviously, time is limited, which is why I oftentimes need to pay for outside counsel's time. Financial responsibility, however, is another pressure. If I don't closely watch the bills from outside counsel, I may blow through a pre-established budget and may not have money down the road for when I really have a problem."

The cost savings factor is partly why Gottschalk prefers working with midlevel associates. It's also because they tend to be closer in age and more intune with the type of business engaged in by Sittercity than older partners. In addition, Gottschalk said he believes that giving younger attorneys opportunities to shine within a firm is a value he can provide.

But ultimately, knowing Gottschalk, and what makes him tick, is key to landing work from him.

Relationship building is evidently of paramount importance to some clients like Gottschalk. This is particularly true for small or midsize companies, like Sittercity, whose management style is less hierarchical, formulaic and traditional. As Gottschalk put it: "Your drinking buddy one day may become your client the next. Maintaining a friendly and professional relationship is key to landing business."