

Leadership SBOT Interview Questions



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1. *What are your responsibilities at BancTec?*

As Senior Vice President of BancTec, I am I am responsible for management and delivery of all legal services to BancTec and its subsidiaries. Additionally, the human resources function in the Americas reports to me.

2. *Please describe your organizational structure (e.g., what department are you in, who do you report to, etc.).*

I report to the CEO and the legal, contracts and HR departments report in to me.

3. *What do you find most challenging in your position?*

The sheer diversity of what we must deal with on a daily basis while operating within the realm of a business function with a defined budget. Every lawyer knows that there are far more laws out there than any single individual can ever learn about in a lifetime, particularly given multinational operations. What many don't realize is that even issue spotting in the routine of business is exceptionally challenging. In-house departments rarely have all necessary expertise in-house, and budgetary restrictions frequently prevent us from consulting outside experts. Spotting issues and then balancing risks vs. rewards for the client in that context is uniquely challenging.

4. *It is sometimes said that attorneys who make the transition from a firm to an in-house position may struggle when they are required to manage people because law firms do not train lawyers to be good managers. Do you agree with this? Do you have any advice for improving management skill development or improvement?*

I agree. Associates are trained to put out first-class legal work, not manage projects or other individuals. There are many ways for motivated individuals to

learn to lead and manage. Most of these methods are learned in the abstract, but become effective after practice – requiring hands-on experience to truly work. Unless leadership experience was obtained from a previous career opportunity, I very strongly encourage each in-house attorney to study leadership techniques in any available forum and then put them into practice at the earliest opportunity to gain experience.

5. ***Do you enjoy managing people?***

Yes! Managing people can bring about both the best and the worst moments of any job, but overall it is positive aspect of the role. There is little more satisfying than putting together a solid team and watching it work efficiently.

6. ***What do you most enjoy about your position?***

The sheer diversity of what we deal with every day (see #3 above). I cannot remember when I last had a boring day.

7. ***What do you wish you had known earlier in your career?***

I wish I'd known how the trend of criminalizing federal law would take off as much as it has, particularly in the area of public company governance.

8. ***Is there anything in particular you think a young attorney should consider before moving in-house?***

First, remember that even though you are now part of the client and part of what ought to be a scalable business process (e.g., doing sales deals) you are still in a service capacity. Personal service is still what makes and breaks your career in-house. Second, if you want to progress in the field and you don't reside in a very large metropolitan area, you will probably have to relocate sometime in your career. Outside counsel may shift firms, but they usually stay in the same city. Inside counsel will likely have to move from one city to another to chase the more senior positions that open up from time to time.

9. ***Can you describe some non-legal job opportunities that you have encountered that young lawyers might consider or pursue?***

Yes. Transitioning from the legal world into the business side of the M&A world is a well-worn path. Likewise, lawyers often wind up in business roles within private equity firms. In addition, there are increasing opportunities for lawyers to take significant business roles within companies that provide legal-related services, such as eDiscovery companies and legal process outsourcing companies.

10. *Can you compare working in-house to working within a firm?*

There are so many differences that it is hard to spell them all out. First, you don't have to do traditional business development. You don't get paid any more if you have Salesman Joe coming to you, as opposed to the next counsel down the hall (although, that's usually a good sign that you are valued by the customer!). Second, for both good and bad, you are "part of the business". That's a great way to have fun making a deal work or helping a business succeed, but you are also more likely to run into ethical issues in the course of doing the work. It can be challenging to deal with those ethical issues when they irritate the business that cuts your entire paycheck.

11. *In general, what can an attorney expect compensation-wise in an entry-level position with an in-house legal department? Is the compensation comparable to the compensation with a large firm?*

That varies so much I'm not sure there is a good answer for it. You will likely take a pay cut coming in-house. That said, pay-per-hour may not go down so much if you take away all the "nonbillable" time you're expected to put in as an associate (e.g., ghost-writing articles for partners and business development).

12. *What advice would you give to a young attorney for career development or advancement within companies?*

First, learn to do one thing extremely well -- Specialize. Make sure it is a repetitive need of a number of corporations. Companies that used to hire the "best athlete" are now hiring only those who have a specific skill set to accommodate a defined need. Once you've landed the role, take every opportunity to broaden your skill set. For example, if you are a junior sales-support lawyer, try doing a few small M&A deals. Work as much as you can out of your comfort zone to build skills that a future employer may find desirable. Finally, as you get more senior within the company, try to get any experience you can in the corporate securities, governance, M&A and corporate-finance realms. Those are the areas that the people who run companies care most about, and thus, that is the experience they'll look for when they are hiring their next general counsel.

13. *Sometimes lawyers within law firms express a desire to go in-house because of the perception of better work-life balance as an in-house attorney. How do you think the two compare?*

Again, it depends. Some companies work their lawyers like wage-slaves. Others have a business environment that is conducive to more predictable hours. It all depends on the corporate culture and what exactly your key functions are. What you typically don't have in-house is the pressure to go out and sell new business. That's often considered a major plus.

14. *Has the change in the economy affected your job? And if so how?*

Absolutely. Declining business opportunities mean declining budgets, layoffs and similar activities that are no fun for anyone. Increasing business opportunities provide an environment that is much more conducive to professional and organizational development. We've seen both in the last few years and in-house departments are along for the ride both ways.

15. *What advice would you give young attorneys about seeking out either a position with a company, either in a legal or non-legal position?*

Network, network, network. Finding opportunities to go in-house isn't easy, and often they come from the most unusual sources. Your chances are much better if you hear about an un-advertised opportunity than an advertised opportunity that has 25 other qualified suitors applying for it. In addition, learn something about the fundamental business processes you want to support. If you are a securities lawyer, learn as much as you can about accounting, how that process typically is managed and what unique issues the particular company has faced in the recent past. If you are an employment lawyer, learn as much as possible about employee relations issues from that company's business context. That way you can speak to the client in its language during the interview cycle.