

Here Are The Law Firms That Train The Most GCs

By **Sue Reisinger**

Law360 (August 9, 2021, 4:19 PM EDT) -- When Perkins Coie dealmaker Eric Greenberg moves into the general counsel seat at Cox Media Group on Aug. 16, he'll represent the latest example of how companies sometimes turn to Big Law to find their legal department leaders.

From February 2017 through May 2021, U.S. law firms sent at least 1,025 attorneys directly into general counsel or chief legal officer slots, according to an analysis by Firm Prospects, which tracks such moves. Figures since May 31 are not yet available.

The study shows that 192 law firms served up lawyers to be general counsel over that period. The moves were led by DLA Piper and Kirkland & Ellis LLP, each with 28 or more people moving directly into GC jobs at public and private companies.

While the numbers are fairly accurate, they may not be exact because scraping the internet, as Firm Prospects does, may not capture every GC hire. Some companies may not publicize their hires. Also, the numbers do not include GCs of government agencies, of corporate divisions, or of companies outside the U.S, according to Firm Prospects' co-founder and CEO, Adam Oliver.

Following the two leaders were Goodwin Procter LLP, Husch Blackwell LLP, Holland & Knight LLP and Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati PC. Those firms all had from 15 to 18 or more general counsel placements in the time period.

Richard (Rick) Chesley, co-U.S. managing partner for DLA Piper, said it can be "natural evolution" for a partner to become close enough to a client company that the company wants the attorney as its general counsel.

"We don't sit here and think we want that," Chesley said. "But if a partner wants to do that, we absolutely encourage it. It's a win for our colleague and a win for our firm."

Chiara Wrocinski, chief administrative officer at Kirkland and founder of its CareerLink program, agreed. If a Kirkland attorney wants to

Top 10 Law Firms Spawning GCs

These firms are training grounds for hundreds of law department leaders.

DLA Piper	28
Kirkland	27
Goodwin	18
Husch Blackwell	17
Holland & Knight	15
Wilson Sonsini	15
Hogan Lovells	14
Jones Day	14
Perkins Coie	14
Winston & Strawn	14

Source: Firm Prospects
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take an opportunity outside the firm, Wrociniski said the firm is fully supportive.

"We help them make whatever career move is best for them," she said. "Unsurprisingly, many of our alums are either at a client or become a client. It really is a win, win for everyone involved."

Both law firm leaders said it was unsurprising that their firms are tapped to fill GC jobs so often. The two praised the depth of skills of their lawyers, the scope of their practices, and the training and preparation the attorneys receive.

But at least one recruiting expert was surprised. "To be honest, I don't see a lot of companies asking for a general counsel from a law firm," said PJ Harari, a partner and co-global practice leader of the in-house counsel recruiting group of Major, Lindsey & Africa.

Hiring from a law firm makes sense, Harari said, "If it's an outside counsel that the company knows well, especially smaller companies. Or, if they have a special need," as for someone with a litigation or regulatory background.

She said the bulk of GC hires come from other in-house jobs because "there is a learning curve to advising in-house, and generally it needs to be developed earlier in your career."

Another exception, she said, is if an attorney is managing an office, a team or a practice area and a company is looking for someone with management experience.

"That's the issue in a nutshell," said Susan Hackett, a law department consultant based in Bethesda, Maryland, and former general counsel of the Association of Corporate Counsel. "Executive leadership is what a chief legal officer should be chosen for. So that's what should drive the decision, whether the person being considered is in-house or in a law firm."

If the law department is well-grounded and mature, Hackett said, then bringing in someone who may not have in-house experience is not as risky. But "if the company is starting its first legal function, I'd think that the decision to hire someone with in-house experience is more likely," she added.

DLA Piper's Chesley said he expects companies to continue looking at law firm partners when they choose a GC.

"There's just an incredible thirst for talent in-house," Chesley said. "Match that with where we are talent-wise and geographically, and I'm not surprised" to see the trend keep going.

--Editing by Peter Rozovsky.