How to Build, Lead and Manage Your Legal Team:
A Checklist for In-House Counsel   By Heather Gardiner

A panel of industry experts discussed best practices for building an in-house team at a seminar held at Blake, Cassels & Graydon LLP's Toronto office. The event was organized by the Ontario Chapter of the Canadian Corporate Counsel Association.

The panellists included Kikelomo Lawal, deputy general counsel at Interac Association/Acxsys Corporation; Mary Martin, executive vice-president, general counsel and corporate secretary at Metrolinx; Sharon Ranson, president and founder of The Ranson Group; and Kate McGilvray, a Partner at Blakes.

The following checklist summarizes key points from the session.

BUILD

- ☑ Create relationships with your team members, build trust and act as a **mentor**
- ☑ **Delegate** – establish group leaders to help oversee, assess and mentor the team
- ☑ Seek out and assess others' **perceptions** of the legal department and figure out how to change them
- ☑ Evaluate the legal department's **accountabilities**
- ☑ Define a clear **vision and objectives** for the legal department, decide on achievable goals and develop a re-branding strategy if necessary
- ☑ Set the team up for success by including team members who **work well together**

LEAD

- ☑ Express **gratitude**, recognize team members' contributions and seek their input
- ☑ Look for opportunities to give team members **stretch assignments**
- ☑ Take **risks**
- ☑ **Avoid isolation** in a small legal department by participating in general counsel groups
- ☑ Determine the legal team's **responsibilities** by clearly defining the various goals and roles, and hold team members accountable
- ☑ Be an **advocate** for your team and lead by example

MANAGE

- ☑ **Communicate** – raise awareness about different work styles (yours and others'), keep the team informed and listen to your team members
- ☑ Establish **preferred method of communication** (i.e. in-person meetings, phone calls, emails)
- ☑ Identify and communicate **hot-button issues** from the outset
- ☑ **Execute** – communicate your message in a way that is accessible, engaging, memorable and available
- ☑ **Check in** regularly to provide progress and status reports
- ☑ Encourage **two-way feedback** to identify possible improvements between internal and external teams