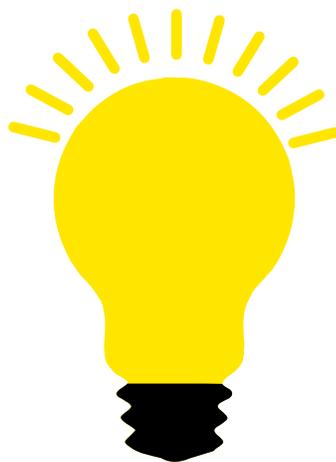


The Perks of Great Problem Solving

Juniper Networks' Meredith McKenzie has made Silicon Valley her home because of the innovative, intentional mindset there

By KELLI LAWRENCE





While she's mentoring up-and-coming law students, Meredith McKenzie encourages them to ask questions of themselves: "What engages you?" and "How do you like to work?" McKenzie understands the importance of these questions because she says she lacked such self-awareness in her own youth, "stumbling" into technology-related law almost by

accident. Nevertheless, she's made in-house counsel for Silicon Valley companies her niche for the overwhelming majority of her career—and Sunnyvale-based Juniper Networks her work home since 2012.

"I like technology, I like business, and I like the law," McKenzie says. "So where I've ended up, working for companies like Juniper, combines those three things in a way that's ideal for me."

It was the technology aspect that grabbed her first. Excellence in math propelled McKenzie to MIT, where she eventually settled on an electrical engineering degree and spent most of her time after graduation designing microchips as a design engineer for Intel Corporation. Eventually, her goal of obtaining a PhD fell to the wayside—she wanted to know too much about a lot of different things to focus so specifically, McKenzie says. Instead, she took advantage of a program at Intel that allowed engineers to transition to the company's legal department and pursue patent law by obtaining patents for Intel. After a few years, she moved into patent litigation as she moved into her first and only job at a law firm.

As her base of legal knowledge expanded to include further intellectual property areas such as trademarks, copyrights, open source, and licensing, so too did her in-house counsel experience. Juniper, a multinational company founded in 1998 that specializes in the marketing and development of networking products, is giving McKenzie her biggest opportunity yet as vice president and deputy general counsel. She credits a highly collaborative culture—and strong regard for Juniper's legal department—among its most appealing assets. "It feels like a lot of the decisions are just business decisions, not purely legal," she says. "But I think the legal department is respected so well that they're

**Meredith
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asked to weigh in on nonlegal issues. We have a good perspective of what's going on not just legally, but throughout the company. It's really just a different type of problem solving that we do: how to deal with whatever issue or restriction we have in a way that still allows the business side to do what they need to do in a timely and effective manner."

From her days at Intel onward, a passion for problem solving has been at the heart of McKenzie's skill set. Nowadays, she's working with people rather than microchips, but it's a calm, unflappable method of problem resolution that makes her such a strong in-house asset. "There's a partnering you need to do with the other people in your company," McKenzie says. "I don't think you can just tell them, 'Here's the law, here's yes or no.' Usually you're advising them on risk, helping them come up with less risky alternatives."

The risks vary from year to year. Early in McKenzie's tenure at Juniper, her team was heavily involved in developing processes for open-source software. One year later, the focus was on standards organizations—not a new issue unto itself, but ever-evolving with regards to intellectual property. This past year, on the other hand, has been all about information protection and security as government regulations begin to play a bigger role in how things get done.

No matter what hot-button issue is at play, McKenzie thinks the best in-house counsel are those that excel at brainstorming

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MEREDITH MCKENZIE

multiple solutions, that think outside the proverbial box in a way that helps both sides reach their objectives, and that have a lot of transparency about the amount of risk involved. “It’s like driving a car,” she says. “You know that going one hundred miles an hour isn’t a good idea in a sixty-five miles-an-hour zone, but what if you go sixty-six? Is that OK? It’s about working through different scenarios to find what works.”

And as she knows from decades of experience—both with the industry and the specific technology it delivers—what works for one company doesn’t always work for another. “At Juniper, we make and sell a product; that’s how this company survives,” McKenzie says. “So, my role is to enable them to do that: to help them navigate issues they need to address to do that.”

McKenzie also knows that, even with all that experience, the learning process is never really done. New issues and responsibilities make life interesting for McKenzie and her team of fifteen at every turn. But proving her ability to not only get things done, but make significant improvements along the way—it’s a feeling that never gets old.

“One of my general philosophies is that I always talk to my team about how we can

make something better,” she explains. “Sometimes it’s something little that no one really wants to talk about. But if it makes something better than it is today, I say, ‘Let’s do it.’”

In an industry so jampacked with innovation, it can be virtually impossible for those involved to see the forest of progress for the individual tasks that make up its trees. But McKenzie finds these routine reflections on the work they’ve done have a way of keeping everyone motivated and engaged. “It doesn’t feel like we’re changing the world, but we keep progressing,” she says. “Before we know it, we’re looking back five years, and we’ve made all these leaps forward. You just don’t realize it at the time.” ■

Meredith has that rare combination of talents for fostering a collaborative, team-oriented legal group yet energizing and motivating each of the team members individually. Her leadership and insight have produced continuous process improvements for Juniper while further integrating outside counsel as partners.

—Shumaker & Siefert, P.A.