

THE ART OF HIRING

Three savvy law departments take different approaches to choosing and training, but each yields excellent results.

BY DAVID HECHLER

HOW DO LAW DEPARTMENTS HIRE AND TRAIN THEIR NEW LAWYERS? We'd never really examined this issue, but conversations with top managers at several companies in recent years had piqued our interest. It seemed clear that some very successful departments had adopted very different approaches—yet each seemed to be yielding the desired results.

So we asked the general counsel at International Business Machines Corporation, Google Inc. and Microsoft Corporation if we could interview some of the people involved in the process. We found one law department that focuses on developing global lawyers; another that hires lawyers for jobs that can change radically in just a few months; and a third that seems intent on preparing theirs for the long haul.

Building Global Lawyers

Bob Weber does something that he says most general counsel “wouldn’t touch with a 10-foot pole. But for whatever reason,” he adds, “it’s worked here.” IBM’s general counsel hires lawyers right out of law school. Another strategy the GC has adopted that others would certainly view as risky is he sometimes moves around his *experienced* attorneys as if they were pieces on a global chess board. What’s *that* all about?

Weber wants his lawyers to be able to adjust to different legal challenges, and also to different locations. “Be comfortable with discomfort” is one of the mantras he repeats to them. It’s all about being nimble, he explains, because that’s what IBM’s business demands.

One of the first radical changes Weber introduced after he joined IBM in 2006 was to rejigger hiring. He was finding that law firm associates weren’t arriving with skills that allowed them to step right in and contribute. It took at least six months



LIDIA PEYRONA USERO,
IBM'S PEOPLE MANAGER,
BASED IN MADRID

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMES RAJOTTE

to train them. And the starting salaries of fourth- and fifth-year associates were much higher than he pays newbies. So Weber figured that it made more sense to hire and train them to be IBM lawyers from day one. It saved money and produced lawyers steeped in the business. Now law school grads constitute about half of his new crop each year.

That makes the training especially important. And most of it takes place in the legal department's four global training centers. Last year the department hired nine new grads in the United States, according to Christina Montgomery, an associate GC and managing attorney who oversees hiring and training. After they took the bar exam, they spent a few days last fall at IBM headquarters in Armonk, N.Y., for orientation. Then they started work at the U.S. training facility in Lansing, Michigan.

And the operative term is "work," Montgomery emphasizes. "There's very little classroom training," she says. "It's

in her region are also straight out of law school, and they train in IBM's center in Dublin. Most of them spend two years there before moving into their assigned countries.

There are two more global training centers. One is in Bangalore and the newest, which opened in 2012, is in Sydney. The new one was designed, in part, to solve a specific need: the staffing problem in Asia that bedevils many multinationals. There's a cultural divide that includes the legal culture, which is not always well defined there, Weber says. And it varies across regions. "How do you get people who can work and understand across all these legal cultures?" Weber asks. Where, he continues, do you find lawyers fluent in "a common grammar?"

The answer, he decided, is law schools in Australia. There are good schools and plenty of students with the skills and experience needed to work in various parts of Asia. Hire and train them in Sydney and, when they're ready, put them to



"BE COMFORTABLE WITH DISCOMFORT."

—BOB WEBER
GENERAL COUNSEL, IBM

real work." They learn about the business while working for the business. But there's a big difference from Montgomery's experience 20 years ago. She also got right to work, but for her there wasn't much training. There was some formal education on employment law, antitrust and competition law and the like. "But mostly I learned my job by doing it," she recalls. And she asked colleagues for help when she needed it.

The new hires in Lansing have many more resources. They're paired with mentors. There's much more formal training, and there's an online cornucopia of information about the law department and the law. The trainees also spend 18–24 months at the center in Michigan before they move into their first jobs. Montgomery keeps watch to make sure they're ready and helps determine their assignments.

About half of IBM's 500 lawyers work abroad, and those lawyers understand immediately what it may take Weber's U.S. hires some time to digest: IBM is truly global. Take Lidia Peyrona Usero, who was a lateral hire when she joined the company in 2003. She was interested in international law and IT. She'd worked for a software company and a dot-com. "Okay, that's the future," she'd said to herself.

Before IBM hired her, she was interviewed by lawyers from Spain, Sweden, France and Italy. It was clear she would have to be open to working in different regions and areas of the law. And that's what she wanted. "We need to work in everything," she says. Peyrona is now based in Madrid, and her responsibilities include managing lawyers in Spain, Portugal, Greece and Israel. Many of the new hires

work. That's the plan. It's too soon to claim victory, Weber acknowledges, but he likes the way it's going so far.

If the idea of plucking a young lawyer out of Australia and dropping him or her into China sounds radical, that's nothing compared to some of the moves Weber has engineered with more experienced lawyers. His former growth markets lead lawyer in Shanghai, for example, now heads global ethics and compliance in the United States. He's taken lawyers in India and dispatched them to Africa. His lead lawyer in China became his lead lawyer in Japan. He's moved lawyers who are at junior levels and lawyers at the top. "You need deep expertise," Weber tells attorneys, "but you also need to demonstrate willingness to take on new and different things." And though these moves often benefit the lawyers, he says, he makes them because he believes they help the department.

"Does this mean I have a bunch of gifted amateurs doing our law?" he asks. Not at all, he says. They learn.

But it doesn't always work out. Sometimes he sends a lawyer on a mission the lawyer can't complete. "That's on me," Weber says. He doesn't fire a lawyer under those circumstances. He finds the person another job. "If you're not making any mistakes," he says, "you're not taking enough chances."

One way Weber has tried to bring all the elements together is through an annual professional development program he calls Building Global Lawyers. He started it in the fall of 2012, bringing together about two dozen promising young lawyers from all over (even including the United States).



MARY SHEN O'CARROLL, GOOGLE'S
LEGAL OPERATIONS MANAGER, AND
DAVE TONISSON, PRODUCT COUNSEL

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TIMOTHY ARCHIBALD

They spent a week in Armonk, listening to a wide variety of speakers. One day was a business course that focused on the company's finances. The next covered international issues such as monetizing IP around the globe. Some speakers were from IBM, but they included colleagues from other departments, such as investor relations. Many speakers were outsiders, such as the chairman of a Fortune 50 company who talked about what he expects from *his* lawyers.

Peyrona from Spain was one attendee. And what made the biggest impression on her, she says, was what followed. The lawyers were broken into (multicultural) groups and assigned long-term projects. Her group was asked to focus on ethics and compliance, an area she'd never worked in.

IBM has a global team of compliance professionals who

Google's approach to hiring is unusual even when the job doesn't change in midstream. Keller says her manager uses a sports metaphor more commonly associated with the National Football League draft to describe it: "We hire athletes." Meaning: They hire the best talent available rather than trying to fill a particular need. In the fast-paced world of Google, where the only constant is change, today's pressing need could be an afterthought in a month or two.

Laszlo Bock, who heads the people operations, says it can be a mistake to allow a manager who has an urgent problem to hire a lawyer. That's why at Google, managers aren't empowered to hire unilaterally. Committees get involved. So a manager focused on an immediate need can't snag a recruit to replace a person who just left, for

GOOGLE

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—MARY SHEN O'CARROLL, GOOGLE

try to ensure that the company conducts business with integrity, and Peyrona's group was effectively learning their jobs. During the months that followed they studied the laws in several countries; then, in April 2013, they traveled to Africa—which happens to be one of fastest-growing regions for IBM's business—to help educate IBM employees there. The group split up and visited 22 countries in all. To end their project, they convened in Nairobi, where they were joined by the company's official compliance team to "share experiences." It was a great opportunity, Peyrona says, to work with colleagues from so many places, and "to visit Africa, the real Africa, the future."

Moving at Warp Speed

When Daphne Keller was hired at Google in 2004, she understood that the process could take time. It seemed to run two months or longer, she recalls. But she had another job offer in hand, so the department moved with exceptional speed. It only took two or three weeks, she says. But somehow, in the interim, the IP counsel job she had applied for had turned into a product counsel job. She took it.

instance, when the better move might be hiring a lawyer who has greater overall potential.

This means that managers don't always get their first choices. Mary Shen O'Carroll, the legal operations manager, has seen some of her "must hire" candidates fall by the wayside. But she's learned to live with the decisions of her colleagues. "I got a different impression," she says. "But it was just one view. We want to bring in someone that everyone thinks is great."

There's a particularly good reason why this approach makes sense at Google. It's not just jobs that change from the interview to the offer that require flexibility. They all do. As O'Carroll puts it: "I don't know what you're going to be working on in a year, but I can guarantee that it won't be what you're working on today."

Dave Tonisson saw that right away. Hired as a product counsel in 2012, he could tell that "what they're really looking for is people who can think creatively." In other words: "It's definitely not the kind of place that expects you to apply the same solution over and over."

Last year, after nine months on the job, Tonisson was one of the lawyers interviewing new prospects. It didn't feel strange, he says. "By the time you're here for nine months, you're pretty much immersed." Nine months at Google is like years at other companies, he adds. And he understood the importance of the hiring process. "Finding people who are not only qualified but fit into the culture you want to



HOSSEIN NOWBAR, DEPUTY GC FOR MICROSOFT'S CLOUD AND ENTERPRISE BUSINESS, AND ANDREA GRIECO, A MEMBER OF HIS TEAM

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOSE MANDOJANA

create makes a really big difference," he notes. "And that's something that Google does really well."

What Google did not always do so well was train its lawyers. When Keller was hired in 2004, there were about 40 lawyers, she says, including about a half-dozen who did what she did. They sat near each other and they talked. That was her "training." Over the years, as the department grew, there were many more people to talk to. And they weren't all sitting within earshot. Some of them gave talks. A great deal of information became available online. Lawyers learned from each other, but it was informal and scattershot. It wasn't so easy to slow down and check it out.

It was only in the last few years that the law department made a real effort to formalize training. And there's a smorgasbord of information for all Googlers, not just for the new hires (also known as Nooglers). For them, buddies are assigned to help them navigate at least the first month. And there are training sessions for everything from essential knowledge about Google to specific areas of the law. In-person sessions with senior counsel are available (sometimes for CLE credit), along with advanced training sessions for teams.

And there's more. A formal mentor matching program is in place, along with lots of career development opportunities. General counsel Kent Walker says legal operations has contributed a great deal to building out the structure, and he has lent a hand. But some of the offerings, he points out, were created by the lawyers and paralegals themselves—notably gHarmony Exchange, which allows individuals or teams to post information about projects they're working on in hopes of attracting collaborators (who don't even have to be lawyers).

It's not that these offerings are completely new. There were always opportunities to learn. But before, Tonisson

on the basis of the data, Bucich says. And new subjects are developed.

If the cycle sounds endless, that's also the Google way. "You're always training here," says Tonisson, who says he's a regular at Keller's sessions. "It doesn't matter how long you've been here."

The Long Haul

Andrea Grieco remembers her first job interview at Microsoft. She'd booked a flight from San Francisco for the day before, leaving plenty of time to relax and rest. But it was delayed for seven hours and didn't take off until 12:30 a.m. She landed in Seattle at 3:30—and was due in Redmond at 8 a.m. sharp.

The first question she remembers in the very first interview was asked by a paralegal, who immediately launched into a hypothetical about technology. He grabbed a marker and attacked a white board, diagramming how some complicated program works. There were lots of arrows, Grieco remembers. "Now the client has a question about this," he said, gesturing to the mess on the board. "How would you handle it?"

It was probably the hardest question she fielded all day. "Oh my gosh," she thought. "I should be on my second cup of coffee for this." But looking back, it wasn't off-base. "It was something that took me by surprise," she says, "but it was reflective of what we do." At a law firm, you focus on legal issues. But at Microsoft she also focuses on technology, and even asks questions about code.

The most stressful interview, however, was the last one. A senior manager told her he wanted to get to know her not just as a lawyer but as a person. He asked rapid-fire questions and told her not to filter her answers. "What's your favorite dish?" he asked. (Spinach.) "What do you want in it?" (Garlic.) "If you ordered it in a restaurant and it wasn't prepared to your liking, would you send it back?" (Probably not, she told him. She'd once been a waitress.)

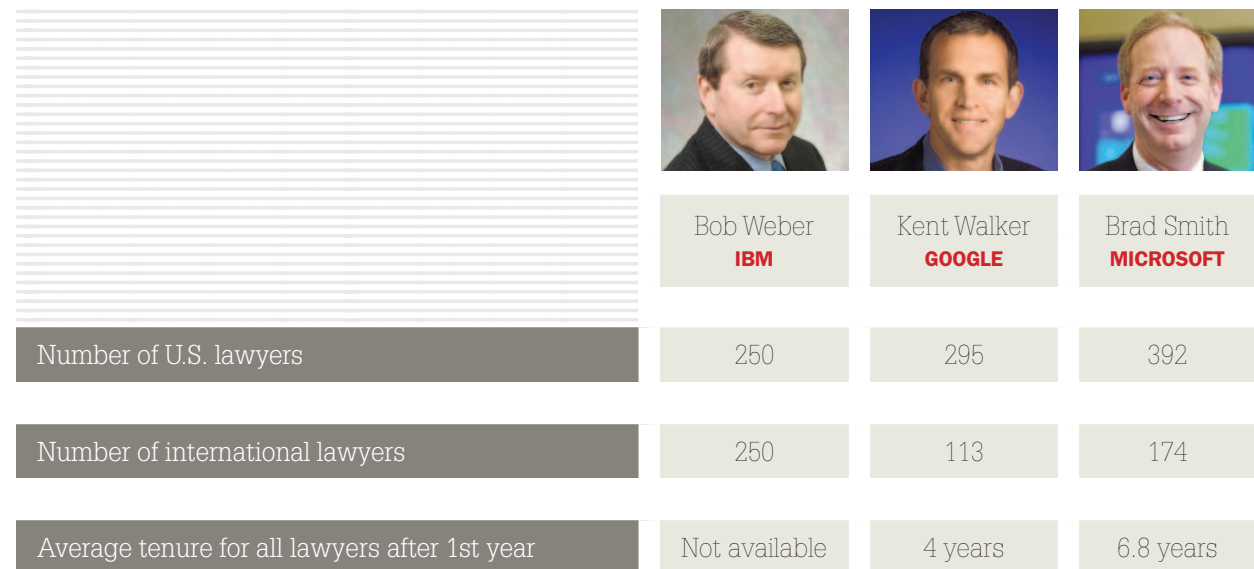
It was like a verbal Rorschach test. "It took me out of my comfort zone," she says. But after she got into the rhythm, she liked it. And she believes that it's important for the people doing the hiring to gauge how a candidate will fit

MICROSOFT
"IT TAKES A YEAR TO GET COMFORTABLE."

—ANN SMITH, MICROSOFT

says, "you sort of had to know where to look. Now that process is a lot more formalized." And it doesn't have to be fancy to be popular. Keller offers a weekly training that is extremely well attended. "I get so much love," she says. "People stop me in the halls and thank me." She also holds "office hours" (though the lawyers don't have offices) and answers questions, sometimes directing lawyers to colleagues who are better positioned to answer than she.

And because this is Google, it's all data-driven. As Becky Bucich, who works with Bock in People Operations, points out, there are surveys about everything: people, training, products, careers. The curriculum is analyzed and tweaked



into the group. When she interviewed candidates during her three years as an associate at Morrison & Foerster, she trusted that everyone she met looked good on paper. What she wanted to know was: "Can I put them in front of a client? Am I going to be able to work with these people at 2 in the morning?"

She got it, says Hossein Nowbar, the senior lawyer who conducted Grieco's last interview. (And Grieco also got the job last August.) Nowbar, who is deputy general counsel for Microsoft's cloud and enterprise business, says he always tries to probe beyond the resume. And part of the reason is that he once needed people to look beyond his.

In fact, he's had to prove himself again and again. The boy who was born in Iran and spoke no English when he arrived in the United States in 1979 had a long way to go to graduate at the top of his law school class. And even after four years working on litigation and retail leasing for Starbucks as an associate at Davis Wright Tremaine, it wasn't exactly a cakewalk convincing the people at Microsoft that he was prepared for a career in tech law. "The people who hired me looked beyond my resume," he says. "And they took a risk."

Now that Nowbar has worked at the company for close to 17 years, and is deeply involved in the hiring process, he tries to remember that lesson. "One of the things I make sure we do is that we don't miss out on the diamonds in the rough," he says. And just because a lawyer doesn't have a resume with all the right boxes checked, that shouldn't be the deciding factor. "If a candidate is very successful in one area of the law," he suggests, "the likelihood that they will be successful in another area is very high."

His Exhibit A is a lawyer who had worked at Washington Mutual. He was "a banker," Nowbar says, not an IP guy or someone with a typical Microsoft resume. But Nowbar plumbed beneath the surface. This was also a guy who likes to buy and refurbish off-road trucks, then drive them (off-road, of course) from Washington to California. He loves it when they break down, he told Nowbar, because he has to



Bob Weber
IBM

Kent Walker
GOOGLE

Brad Smith
MICROSOFT

250 295 392

250 113 174

Not available 4 years 6.8 years

figure out how to keep going. The quality that struck Nowbar was his "fearlessness." This was a man who would not only survive, he would thrive and inspire others.

About half of the lawyers they hire come from law firms, and half from law departments, according to general counsel Brad Smith. Of the second group, 80 percent worked at companies and the other 20 for government agencies. He likes the mix of experiences, Smith says, because the knowledge that new hires bring of how other companies function benefits his department. "We can learn from them," he says.

What *they* learn from *Microsoft* is prodigious, and the training is highly organized. How organized? A notebook for the new lawyers is sent to them even before they start. The material they eventually get online is vast, and covers everything from big-picture core values down to details about how the department operates and why.

And lest the experience feel impersonal, there are lots of live training sessions in Redmond, and these are also recorded for distribution. In addition, Smith hosts a series of lunches during the year with small groups of the new hires (around 15 per session) to talk about the department and answer questions. These are for the lawyers who live in the Seattle area. For those who work abroad, he waits until there's a global all-hands meeting and hosts breakfasts.

Even though Microsoft's lawyers almost all arrive with a fair amount of previous work experience, their integration into a global department that features 566 attorneys takes time. So many issues, so many people, so many places, so many products. And recently, according to Ann Smith, the department's learning and development manager, there have been new sessions for everyone as Microsoft transitions from a software to a devices and services company.

So how long does it take for a lawyer to get into the swing of things? About a year, Ann Smith says. It takes that long to get comfortable. "When I was told it would take a year, I said, 'It might take *other* people that long, but I'm extra sharp. It won't take me that long.'"

She pauses before adding: "But it did." ■