

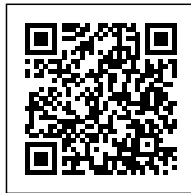
FROM GC TO CLO IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Posted on 2 January 2023



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With Suzan Taha

In today's global business environment, the role of the chief legal officer (CLO) is becoming increasingly important. CLOs are responsible for managing all legal matters within an organization and ensuring that the company is in compliance with all relevant laws and regulations. This can be a complex and challenging role, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa, where the legal landscape is constantly evolving.

The topic was the focus of a Roundtable held on the day of the first ever LegalcommunityMENA Awards. The speakers explored the role of the CLO in the Middle East and North Africa and discussed the key skills and qualities necessary for success in this role.

Mahmoud Shaarawy, Chief Legal & Compliance Officer, HSA Group, addressed the importance of having a legal professional as part of a company's C-Suite saying, "Many years ago companies used to depend exclusively on external counsel for legal services, this has since changed, and in-house counsel started carrying most of the load. With their solid understanding of the company's industry and business operations, they are better equipped to identify potential legal risks and opportunities and provide valuable guidance to the company's leadership. Financial acumen is also important for

CLOs, as they may be responsible for managing legal budgets and negotiating contracts. Lawyers who have a strong understanding of finance and financial analysis will be better equipped to make informed decisions about legal matters that impact the company's bottom line."

"As a member of Board of Directors of companies and a chairman of various others, I can say that multinational companies have known the importance of general counsel and CLO for many years. The realization of how critical it is to have someone heading the legal and compliance department was not shared by the MENA Region until recently. The head of legal has to combine two talents, one is management and other is to continue being a good lawyer. You cannot run the department or be the boss of other lawyers if you're not yourself on top of it all. CLOs need to have strong communication skills, leadership abilities, knowledge of various languages and the ability to work collaboratively with other members of the executive team and across departments as well as jurisdictions", added **Ziad Bahaa-Eldin**, Managing Partner, Bahaa-Eldin Law Office in cooperation with BonelliErede.

As the general counsel role continues to evolve, both as business partners and trusted advisors, the expectations of companies of the individuals also increase. **Reham Naeem**, Country Head of Legal, Novartis Egypt commented, "The area of focus in the coming era is digital solutions. When we first started, we used to draft everything manually and we used to say that we are not technology friendly, but this should not continue. We should familiarize and equip ourselves with the digital and technology world. Data privacy and anti-trust are also growing and evolving heavily in the region. We therefore need to play a role in those areas by having good relations with the authorities and key decision makers. Open the dialogue with the external world and understand the country's direction and future plans. As counsel working in multinational companies, we are fortunate to have the exposure to best practices from other countries and this is a great advantage."

"A good General counsel needs to have a balance between being very good friend with your business and your management and in the meantime to know when to hold the horses and when to stop them from going south. This is the bread and butter of every GC.",said **Mohamed Elmogy**, Regional Lead Counsel, Siemens Energy. "As lawyers we have to keep learning and educating ourselves. We also need to teach and pass on information to the next generation. Minding your team, respecting your colleagues and respecting others is definitely a key of success for any lawyer. Knowledge of litigation is crucial for corporate lawyers to know. An in-house counsel with a litigation background will review a conflict while seeing himself standing in front of a court defending the draft of the contract. It is therefore how proper litigation is done."