Being “DRI for Life”

The 2014 Annual Meeting

By K. Kristann Carey

I am amazed every year I attend the DRI Annual Meeting and this year was no exception. The caliber of speakers from the main stage to every SLG breakout was stellar. Our own Corporate Counsel Committee program featured speakers on managing high-stakes crisis, or, more importantly, managing your business partners to help them get through a high-stakes crisis. Helio Fred Garcia, a renowned crisis management and communications expert, provided our members with practical guidance on how to evaluate a crisis situation and properly advise our business partners on action steps. In a crisis, in-house lawyers must balance managing future risks resulting from the crisis and the company’s need to respond quickly and definitively to the crisis. Fred challenged us to step out of our comfort zones as lawyers and look at the crisis from different perspectives, including the outside stakeholders, company shareholders, customers, and media. Cory Cahn, assistant general counsel for Entergy Corporation, gracefully shared his experiences from the power outage at the Superdome during the 2013 Super Bowl. The combination of Fred’s guidance framed into Cory’s real-life situation provided a case study on crisis management and how, when handled correctly, a crisis can highlight and improve a company’s public reputation.

During the main stage programs, we had a chance to hear a candid conversation with David Drummond, senior vice president, corporate development and chief legal officer of Google. David holds a unique but more common role not only as a company’s head lawyer, but also as a leader within a business unit. In-house lawyers balance our responsibilities as legal counselors with the growing demand from our business partners to become a sounding board for business issues. I am willing to predict that this dual role is the wave of the future for in-house lawyers. My prediction is based on David’s statement that one of his wishes for new lawyers is that they are less specialized and more generalist. (David probably knows a thing or two about predicting the future!) As corporate generalists, we get the opportunity to touch all areas of our business and gain a broader, more strategic view of our company’s strengths and opportunities.

How can DRI and C3 help you develop your skills so that you can take advantage of this changing wave in the business world? We offer you the opportunity to learn about topics and substantive areas of law that may not be in your wheelhouse. Are you a litigator who wants to know more about corporate compliance? We have a seminar for you—the Government Enforcement and Corporate Compliance Seminar. Are you an insurance lawyer who wants to know more about trademarks? We have a seminar for you—the Intellectual Property Seminar. Is your travel or training budget constrained? We have a seminar for you—the Annual Meeting. Attending the Annual Meeting is a virtual legal buffet all in one place.
DRI’s 2014 Annual Meeting opened with keynote speaker David Drummond, Google Senior Vice President, Corporate Development and Chief Legal Officer. As a leader of one of the most successful companies in the world, Mr. Drummond shared his perspective on the business and legal landscape.

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Learn a little bit about all the different areas of law in which you might not otherwise have an opportunity to immerse yourself in your day-to-day job.

Not only can we build your legal skill sets, we can help build your leadership skill sets. C3 gives you the opportunity to lead a team and be part of a leadership team. Build your skills and relationships with other in-house lawyers. Take advantage of the opportunity to learn from seasoned lawyers who have led teams at their respective companies. Leadership is a skill that must be practiced and practiced often. We have all the tools to ensure that you are ready to meet all the challenges of your job now and in the future. Remember: your job today may be very different from your job tomorrow and, as Louis Pasteur said, “fortune favors the prepared mind.”

At the Wednesday evening welcome reception, someone asked me what it meant to me to be “DRI for Life.” It was a great question that frankly, I hadn’t really thought about. So I pondered for a moment and looked around the room. And then it occurred to me that being “DRI for Life” encompassed everything and every person who was in the room at that moment. It was about all the new people I met that night and relationships I built over the next several days. It was about reconnecting and catching up with those relationships I’ve developed over the years as a DRI member. It was about the high caliber and very knowledgeable speakers who taught me something new. It was about the great DRI staff who work tirelessly to ensure that the members reap all the benefits that DRI has to offer. So to me, being “DRI for Life” means committing to those people around me to build and maintain great relationships and taking advantage of all the opportunities to learn and develop my legal and business acumen. So although I may not have left my heart in San Francisco, I certainly did take away a new appreciation and commitment to be “DRI for Life.”

At the DRI Annual Meeting, Helio “Fred” Garcia of the Logos Institute for Crisis Management and Executive Leadership spoke during the Corporate Counsel Committee session about how in-house counsel can chart the course for their business leaders in high stakes decisions or crisis management.