

From the Outside Looking In: Getting Hired by In-House Counsel with Jaimala Pai, Principal Legal Counsel at Medtronic Law Firm Marketing Catalyst Podcast [PODCAST]

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It's perhaps the legal industry's most-asked question: how can attorneys get noticed by in-house counsel? [Jaimala Pai](#), Principal Legal Counsel at [Medtronic](#), joined the [Law Firm Marketing Catalyst podcast](#) to offer her tips, including how to stand out by finding a niche, and why diversity and inclusion is so important. Read the transcript below.

Sharon: Welcome to the Law Firm Marketing Catalyst podcast. Today my guest is Jaimala Pai, Principal Legal Counsel at Medtronic, where she provides legal support across all business groups. Jaimala has a strong marketing perspective and has some important tips for outside counsel in terms of making inroads with fellow attorneys in-house. Jaimala, very glad to have you.

Jaimala: Thanks so much Sharon. Really glad to be talking to you today.

Sharon: Jaimala, tell us about how you got where you are. I know that you were in private practice with an outside firm. How did you segue from that into being in-house? Was it something you wanted? Was it a random call from a headhunter? How did that come about?

Jaimala: I think I knew pretty early on that I wanted to go in-house. During law school, I was the only summer law clerk at 3M's Office of General Counsel, and I really enjoyed my experience. Specifically, I enjoyed learning about the business, working closely with business personnel and figuring out how to provide practical advice in a business setting. So, I knew I wanted to be an in-house attorney and began networking. I met with both in-house and law firm attorneys and asked them about their careers, and I told them about my aspirations. Sure enough, when an in-house attorney reached out to one of the law firm partners I had met to look for a junior-level attorney, they provided my name. I immediately jumped on the opportunity and began my in-house career at Northwest Airlines, which is now Delta, and I've now been in-house for 12 years at various companies, including a Fortune 10 company.

Sharon: So, you've been in a variety of industries.

Jaimala: Yes, I have, from airline to health insurance to now med device.

Sharon: That sounds very interesting. If I had nickel for every time I was asked by a lawyer in private practice about how they can attract the attention of in-house counsel, I could have retired a long time ago. We'd all like to hear your advice. I'm also curious because it seems like you've given it a lot of thought, more than other in-house counsel that I've met or heard speak. You wrote an article on the subject, published in the Legal Executive Institute publication. What got you thinking about business development from the perspective of outside counsel?

Jaimala: I think what got me thinking about it is a couple of things. One was a client looking for outside counsel. I practice in a very specific practice area. I am in health law, and beyond that it's fraud and abuse in health law, so I've had a very hard time finding people who could help me on various projects, and also just from the networking perspective. I'm friends with multiple people who are junior-level partners and even senior-level partners who come across the same thing, which is how do we break into a large company like Medtronic? How do we get noticed when these larger companies have preferred provider networks or a series of closed networks of law firms? How do I get in front of somebody to talk to a decision maker? So, it's really made me think about that. And you're right, I put some of the thoughts in the article, which I will expand on in this podcast.

Sharon: So, what is your advice? Where do we start?

Jaimala: I think my first point is don't be a generalist. In-house counsel are required to be generalists, like a Swiss Army Knife. We need to know a little about a lot to cover most everyday questions across innumerable subject matter areas. When we look to outside counsel, we're looking for a specific tool that this Swiss Army Knife won't do. The issue requires deeper experience and more specialized expertise. So, really be specific about your area of expertise and call it out on your firm online biography, because I often look up firm biographies to understand experience. I may also get a referral. I may know our network of law firms, but I need to look for one specific person, so I'll just click on the firm website to see who has the expertise I'm looking for.

Sharon: Will you do a Google search with healthcare technology or healthcare devices, or do you just start because you have names?

Jaimala: Sometimes I have names. Sometimes I do Google searches, and sometimes I look at specific law firms. I may have a law firm—we have 10 law firms, for example, in Medtronic's preferred provider network—but I don't have a list, aside from what their website says, of who the regulatory healthcare counseling attorneys are. From there, that may give me a feed of 10 different attorneys, or sometimes it's 20 because everybody's thrown in everything, and then I actually click on their website and their bios to see whether they have the experience I'm looking for, and whether it's specific enough to be able to help on the issue I have.

Sharon: So, attorneys should be very specific. Can you give some examples?

Jaimala: One of the main things that I see are industry phrases being used, like, "I work with life sciences companies," and that's helpful but it's not helpful. I would like someone who specifically can say, "I work with med device companies versus pharmaceutical companies," because our issues are different. One of the reasons why we use outside counsel is because we want someone who has more industry expertise and can give us information on what other companies are doing, obviously without violating privilege. They can say, "In my experience, this is how I've worked this issue in other companies across the same med device industry that are trying to do this, or conversely, you guys are outliers. I've never heard this before." Sometimes that's a good thing and sometimes that's a bad thing, but if you don't have that industry expertise and I'm still getting my narrow view

of a Medtronic-only perspective on an issue, that's not as helpful.

Sharon: I know lawyers are so resistant to focusing. I can't tell you how many times we've suggested that perhaps a laundry list is not the best way to go. These are lawyers who often have distinct expertise, but they don't want to focus in on it. Why do you think that is?

Jaimala: I think you hit the nail on the head in the past, when we had a conversation, and it's the fear of missing out. They think if they don't have the laundry list on their bio, a client may come in and not see an area they can help on and not be interested in them. I actually think it's more the other way around. In this day and age, companies are looking for law firms that have a varied practice area, but they're looking at lawyers for a specific expertise. Your firm may have everything but the kitchen sink under it, but your specific expertise needs to show, so that I know you're the person I should call when I have a fraud and abuse issue for med devices. You will be the person that can talk me through and be the expert, versus us muddling through something together because you think you can do it, but you haven't really ever done it in the past.

Sharon: Yes, I think it is the fear of missing out, and I wish every lawyer we've talked with could hear what you're saying. So often we hear, "Nobody's going to look for me online," or "Nobody's going to find me online." What are your thoughts about that?

Jaimala: I do think networking is key, too. It's not just online. I understand why people will think that, but the other information I would give is oftentimes, we don't have these great, big areas of information in-house. For example, I know my network of law firms that I'm supposed to use my budget towards, but I don't have a list of regulatory attorneys from each of those law firms. I still have to go online and look for these things. Even if you're in my network, it doesn't necessarily mean I know the lawyers that are in that firm. So, I do think we look online more than law firms expect, and we don't always just hire our friends. That's another misconception that people have, that you only hire someone you know. I'd love to hire people I know, but sometimes you can't. Like I said, you have a network you have to work in, or conversely, your friend doesn't practice in the area you need. There are a lot of times that we just look straight to websites to find people.

Sharon: What a missed opportunity, in terms of not introducing themselves to you and making it clear who they are.

Jaimala: I think my second tip, Sharon, would be to really invest in relationships; network with everyone including mid-level and junior-level lawyers. Take an interest in what they do for your client and how you might be able to help them. Oftentimes, at these networking events, people go straight to the GC of a business, and I think they don't realize that junior-level attorneys and even mid-level attorneys have considerable authority and influence on who companies hire and evaluating the quality of services that firms provide. Honestly, you never know who will be a general counsel tomorrow. I think you have to realize that there may not be an immediate return, but if you invested in the relationship and built a good reputation, in-house attorneys will find a way to work with you when they're in a position to be able to make outside counsel hiring decisions.

Sharon: That's such a good point, in terms of not just going to the top, especially because time goes by so quickly. It seems like no time at all when you have a new attorney entering a firm and all of a sudden, they're partner. You have to plant the seeds early on.

You've talked about diversity and diverse teams producing more profitable results. Can you tell us about what you look for when you're hiring and your experience with that?

Jaimala: For me, it's at these networking events. Who treated me well? Who didn't just gravitate towards people who look like them? I'm a female minority in the legal profession, and in some ways, I'm a little bit of a unicorn at this stage of my career because so many of us have left the profession or never even joined it. So, I appreciate when people come over and talk to me and don't just gravitate towards those who look like them. There are numerous studies that show that diverse teams produce better economic results. Most companies have taken these studies seriously and made diversity and inclusion a focus and goal. Many law firms require diverse teams to work on their issues, and they want to have both diversity in their in-house teams and their outside counsel.

It feels to me that if law firms remain homogenous, it's almost an impossible task for an in-house department to be diverse, because in-house pulls talent from law firms. To me, if you commit to diversity in the profession and invest in it, you're going to feel more comfortable talking to someone like me. You're going to come up to me in a networking event, and I'm going to think of you when I need to hire somebody and think about how well you treated me. You didn't seem intimidated by me. You were good, so we're going to have a great working relationship, because if in a networking setting you could talk to me, then you could definitely talk to me in a working relationship.

Sharon: Have you seen changes? Are there more firms to choose from? What are the trends that you've seen?

Jaimala: I do think more companies are making this a priority for them, and as a result, more law firms are focusing on it, too. If you demand this, if your clients are demanding something from you, you're going to put focus on it and effort into it. I think recruitment has gone up for sure. I think there are more pipeline organizations. One particular organization that I'm very close to is LCLD, the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity, which is a national organization that doesn't just focus on one affinity group. It's an organization of more than 285 corporate chief legal officers and law firm managing partners and it's dedicated to creating a diverse legal profession. Through the fact that so many companies and managing partners have joined this group, you can see that there is a commitment and a focus on it in the profession, so I have seen some positives. Just being in a room full of other folks that look like me has been great, because most of the time, I'm the only one in the room.

Sharon: Have you ever been in a meeting where a law firm has put a token minority in, even though they may not be relevant to what they're pitching?

Jaimala: I think just about every minority has been that token at some point, including myself. I think it's up to the clients to ask, "O.K., so Jaimala's in the room. What is Jaimala going to work on on this project? Is she only going to be doing doc review, or is she going to be writing these briefs? Is she going to be the core team that takes this to litigation? Is she going to be part of this, or is she going to be relegated to the sidelines?" It's that follow-through that the client needs to do to ensure that you're not just bringing someone to the pitch who's not going to get meaningful work. I think the numbers you put out, saying, "We want 20 percent diversity on a team," doesn't mean anything if that 20 percent is just doc review.

Sharon: I'm looking at some of your suggestions you have for law firms, like committing to a diversity program and investing in it or joining a mentor program with a local school or college. I think that's so important, because we've worked with quite a few law firms, smaller law firms who would love to diversify, but it's a very tight pool to draw from. For whatever reason, they haven't been able to retain people, so right now, there are a bunch of white males. So, these are great suggestions in terms of how they can at least start to support diversity.

Jaimala: Yes, LCLD is a large organization and it takes money to join, and that is something a lot of smaller law firms and even smaller companies can't necessarily commit to, but there are other ways, like you mentioned. It's so easy. You can just reach out to a local law school and offer to be a mentor to a diverse law student. That gives you a different perspective. That gives you incoming talent into the profession as well, and that opens that individual up, who may not have had a lawyer in their family or ever even known a lawyer before they went to law school. You're a network, and I think just doing simple things like that makes a difference.

There are also numerous organizations such as Just the Beginning, which is a pipeline organization that focuses on showing high school and middle school students of color and those of low income backgrounds that there is a path to law school and the legal profession. There are also national affinity bar associations that are great resources and offer wonderful networking opportunities. I think it's good to remember that just because I'm not in this diverse community, that doesn't mean I don't have to join these things, and it doesn't mean this isn't my problem. This is a problem across our profession that everybody needs to own. It's not for women and minorities to solve on their own.

Sharon: That's a great point. We'll put links to the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity and we can also put a link to Just the Beginning, which I haven't heard of before, but it sounds very interesting. How else can outside lawyers get in front of in-house counsel?

Jaimala: I think presentations are huge. This could be CLEs or presentations at different trade associations. When I say presentations, I mean outside counsel is typically tapped to do these presentations, and if they take a step back and think, "This might be more meaningful if I bring someone who's in-house to give industry examples and real-world examples of what's going on. These anecdotes of what really goes on in a company will make me better off connecting with the audience." It's a win-win, because in-house just doesn't get those types of opportunities as much, and we would love to be a part of that and be able to add that to our résumés. I do think it would make the presentation better, because those in-house folks in the audience will say, "Hey, this person has a great relationship with the client, but not only that, I can understand what the client's saying because I go through that all the time. Here's someone who knows how to work with in-house people." I think that's a great way to get in front of in-house and connect, and it's a way that your in-house clients will know that you're thinking of them and opportunities to help their careers. If they, let's say, move companies, they'll still remember that, and in an opportunity where they can hire you, they'll try to do that. I think co-writing an article is another example. Oftentimes, Sharon, as we've talked about, people at law firms think, "Oh, in-house folks are too busy. They don't want to do things like that. They don't have time for it." We may not have as much time in some ways, but we do want to do those things. We do want to continue to grow professionally and get our résumés in order and have publications on them. That's another good opportunity. The best one that I've seen a couple of companies offer is to do CLE presentations for free at various companies, just saying, "Hey, I saw that you're a big government contractor. I'd like to come in and give a great presentation on the ABCs of government contracting. I'll do it for free. I'll fly out to you. What do you think?" Almost any company would take you up on that.

Sharon: Those are great suggestions, and once again, I'm looking at missed opportunities when you say that in-house counsel don't have as many chances to be on a panel or co-write an article. I rarely hear that discussed when we're talking with lawyers in private practice. That is such a fabulous opportunity, in terms of helping in-house counsel build their credibility. I think that's something to be considered.

Jaimala: I think it's great, because sometimes when you get various law firm attorneys on a panel,

it's sort of an ego thing, "Hire me versus them. I'm better." That ends up being what the presentation sounds like, which is obviously not what it's intended to do. If you have that in-house person on the panel, I think it changes the dynamic. They will give a real-world example of what's happened and you'll have the outside counsel giving their expertise, and it really does make for a better presentation.

Sharon: I'm also thinking, it's great to ask an in-house lawyer to be on a panel, but why not just create your own opportunities? You could put a presentation together with a bank or an insurance company and ask in-house counsel to participate. It could just be doing a webinar and asking in-house counsel to join, just to get that perspective and also to let them know that you're thinking about them.

Jaimala: Yes, I think so. That would be great. Like I said, a lot of these opportunities don't come to us as much, partly because we're not as connected in the industry as law firm attorneys are, and we don't know folks who are putting these on. We're not on those associations necessarily at the highest levels. Those tend to be attorneys at law firms, so the opportunities don't come to us as much.

Sharon: That's a great point to keep in mind. Jaimala, I want to thank you so much for being here. This is great information and it's not just a marketing person saying it. It's from you talking from your experience, so I really appreciate it.

Jaimala: Thank you so much, Sharon, I really appreciate you having me on here.

Sharon: I want to let people know that if they want to contact you, they can do that through LinkedIn. That will be in the show notes. I want to thank everyone for listening to the Law Firm Marketing Catalyst podcast. Please join us for our next conversation on topics that will propel your firm forward. Thank you so much.

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