Insights: Publications

Sharper Thinking, Stronger Outcomes: Practical Interpersonal Tools for In-House Counsel

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Kilpatrick's San Parikh and Colleen Bear joined fellow thought leaders Adam Olls (EVP – Deputy Chief Legal Officer, NCSECU) and Erin Rinn (Director, M&A Counsel, Stryker) to discuss “Sharper Thinking, Stronger Outcomes: Practical Interpersonal Tools for In-House Counsel” at the firm's annual “In-House Counsel Summit” in Durham, North Carolina, on September 24. They examined how to strengthen your ability to advise, influence, negotiate, and collaborate effectively with executives, board members, outside counsel, and business stakeholders. The panelists explored how Herrmann International's Whole Brain Thinking methodology, real-world examples, and peer insights can help you adapt your communication, manage difficult conversations, and drive stronger professional outcomes.

Key takeaways from San and Colleen's presentation include:

1. **Thinking agility is a skill, not a personality trait.** You can learn to shift your thinking on purpose when a matter calls for it, and it gets stronger with practice.
2. **No single way of thinking wins alone.** Strong lawyering uses all four: analytical, practical, relational, and experimental. The skill is knowing when to move from one to the next.
3. **Knowing the law is only half the job.** Making it land is the other half. The best legal communicators adjust how they deliver advice so each audience can hear it, understand it, and act on it.
4. **Before you answer, make sure you have the real question.** Ask yourself what you are focused on and what you might be missing. The question you were asked is not always the one that matters.
5. **Don't wait for certainty before you start advising.** Ask “what if,” plan for more than one outcome, and give advice that still works when things change.
6. **Sometimes the best move is to stop doing something.** Stop over-explaining risk when people need a decision. Stop adding steps that don't change the outcome. Stop assuming pushback is irrational. Stop treating the first answer as the only one.
7. **In a crisis, your job is to make things simpler.** Help the team see what is critical, what has to be decided now, what can wait, and what to stop doing so everyone can act.

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