

Insights: Publications

8 Key Takeaways | Less Friction, More Progress: Building Coalitions That Actually Work

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On May 21, Kilpatrick's [Ben Smith](#) and [Colleen Bear](#) teamed up with [Thad Culley](#) and [Will Scott](#) for an engaging virtual roundtable about how people can effectively work together under pressure in the modern legal setting. The panel shared practical strategies and insights for both in-house and law firm scenarios. Attendees walked away with actionable tips to build cohesion across competing interests without forcing consensus, creating sides, or trying to do it all alone.

Here's what we learned—and why you'll want to join us next time:

1. Great teams don't happen by accident—they're intentionally created.

Clear roles, mutual trust, and intentional collaboration transform friction into forward motion. As Patrick Lencioni explores in *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, dysfunction festers when teams assume alignment will emerge organically.

Application idea: Run a quarterly “team operating system” check-in where your legal team explicitly revisits how decisions get made, who owns what, and where handoffs are breaking down.

2. The best legal answer is not enough – being heard is the real win.

In-house counsel must build alignment so legal advice can be understood, accepted, and acted on. Brilliant analysis that sits unread in an inbox is just expensive decoration. Effective general counsel pair legal judgment with organizational influence.

Application idea: Before delivering your next major recommendation, use Gino Wickman's EOS (Entrepreneurial Operating System) IDS process: Identify, Discuss, Solve to map out who needs to buy in, what their real concerns are, and how you'll frame the advice to land with each stakeholder.

3. Lone wolves become bottlenecks.

When one lawyer owns every decision or relationship, the work slows down and institutional trust erodes. As the Harvard Business Review's research on collaborative leadership suggests, hoarding authority signals insecurity, not indispensability.

Application idea: Identify your top three “bus factor” risks (matters where only one person holds the key relationships or knowledge) and create a shadowing or co-counsel rotation this quarter.

4. If you don't define your role early, someone else will - and you may not like it.

Use a “Role Lens” framework to identify what you own, where you advise, and where you influence but do

not decide.

Application idea: Borrow Gino Wickman's "Delegate and Elevate" concept and sort every matter into three columns: own, advise, or influence without deciding. Share it with your cross-functional partners. When everyone can see where legal's authority starts and stops, the "I thought legal was handling that" problem disappears.

5. Coalitions need clarity, not consensus.

The goal is to know who must be aligned for a decision to hold—not to make everyone agree on everything. As Chris Voss notes in *Never Split the Difference*, consensus-seeking dilutes good decisions and leads to weak, unstable agreements.

Application idea: Before your next high-stakes decision, create a "minimum viable coalition" list, the smallest group whose alignment makes the decision durable, and focus your energy there instead of chasing unanimous approval.

6. Nobody follows directions or advice from someone they don't trust.

People are more likely to follow recommendations when they trust the lawyer, the process, and the intent behind the guidance. Research from Maister's Trusted Advisor framework shows that credibility alone doesn't build trust. Intimacy, reliability, and low self-orientation do.

Application idea: Pick one business partner this month and invest in a "trust deposit" – a conversation with no legal agenda, just genuine curiosity about their priorities and pressures. Track how it changes the dynamic when you next bring them a hard recommendation.

7. Name the real issue and move to decision.

Most impasses need a clearer problem statement, a fair airing of perspectives, and a concrete next step.

Application idea: Next time a matter stalls, try the "three sentences" reset: (1) "Here's the real issue as I see it," (2) "Here's what I think we each need," and (3) "Here's what I propose we do by Friday." Brevity forces clarity.

8. Progress over perfection.

Legal teams that wait for complete certainty before acting often find the business has moved on without them. As the ACC (Association of Corporate Counsel) emphasizes in its guidance on strategic legal departments, velocity and pragmatism are competitive advantages for in-house teams.

Application idea: Implement a "70% rule" for low-to-medium-risk decisions: if you have 70% of the information and a reasonable path forward, move—then course-correct as new facts emerge rather than waiting for a certainty that never arrives.

Why Attend?

Want more actionable tips and candid conversations? Look for our next "Dynamic Thinking for an Interpersonal Edge" session coming soon!

You'll leave with tools and tactics you can use immediately to collaborate smarter, lead better, and make your legal workday a little easier.

Questions?

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