

2008 Best Legal Departments

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Corporate Counsel's winner of the "2008 Best Legal Departments" is a telecom company whose legal department has come a long way - from the brink of bankruptcy when morale was low and attorneys were overworked, to financial success where attorneys enjoy advancement opportunities, sophisticated work, access to new technology, flexibility, and diversity.

So who is this big winner? Qwest Communications International Inc. under the direction of its general counsel, Richard Baer.

What I have found particularly interesting about the success of Quest's legal department, as well as that of other notable legal departments like Caterpillar's, is the dedication, down-to-earth, and hands-on approach of their general counsels. Invariably, those general counsels who take an active and consistent role in the recruitment, development, and advancement of its attorneys are those who reap the rewards of highly successful and effective legal departments.

While many claim to be doing just that, only a few are truly dedicated to the process. This is a difficult task that brings with it little glory, and invariably a lot of hard work. Some of the common traits these general counsels share are an openness to new ideas, and the willingness to try new strategies for improvements - from both internal and external sources. They tend to not only be willing to think outside the box, but to also completely reinvent the "box."

The finalists of the "2008 Best Legal Departments" survey also included:

- Caterpillar
- General Motors
- McDonald's

In terms of methodology, the following factors were evaluated: department structure, litigation strategy, management of outside counsel, use of technology, pro bono efforts, compliance, and an open-ended essay question.

Do you agree with the results? How would you rank your own legal department?

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