

LinkedIn Chief Legal Officer

During the past 30 years the Chief Legal Officer (CLO) role has gone through a gargantuan revolution. Few legendary figures know more about these historical shifts than Benjamin W. Heineman Jr., a pioneer in this field who was General Electric's former senior vice president for law and public affairs and is currently a senior fellow at Harvard Law School.

Heineman Jr. lived firsthand when the faintest of inklings indicated that something big was changing. He was one of the first to see the great opportunity as it was and accepted to be part of in-house counsel. Other pioneers include James L. Lipscomb, Thomas Sabatino, Jeff Kindler and PD Villareal. Until then, respected lawyers were basically only partners at prestigious law firms as the corporate counsel role was not perceived as interesting or important. The role of the in-house lawyer grew in depth and scope. It was becoming an important position in various leading edge international corporations. The idea that to have a successful career as a lawyer you had to follow the grind at a law firm and become a partner began to shift. Now, you could be a lawyer at a company and grow into a head position such as a VP Legal or Chief Legal Officer with all the respect and perks that only firm partners had previously enjoyed. In the book, *The Generalist Counsel*, its authors Prashant Dubey and Eva Kripalani illustrate this wonderfully, "This shift in leadership of the profession mirrored the shift to the General Counsel's leadership role in business. By the mid 1990s General Counsel were more frequently reporting directly to the CEO and regularly assuming a place at the leadership table with the CFO and a line of business leaders.