



Lessons
in Leadership:

**An Interview
with
Steph Corey**

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Steph Corey

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- *Tell us a bit about yourself and how you came to be in (or a customer of) the legal business?*

Completely by accident, actually. I originally started down the path to be an investment advisor. I had my brokerage licenses, interned at Merrill Lynch and got a job at a small investment firm out here in California after finishing up with grad school in Pennsylvania. But I hated it. I hated balancing people's accounts, making cold calls and spending my day talking to people who had more money than they knew what to do with, and having to pretend that I was impressed by all those trappings. So I moved to a start-up mortgage banking company and helped run their finance and accounting department, and I had way more fun. After doing that for a while, when it was time to move to my next role, I found an opening at HP, who was hiring a "Financial Operations Manager" for their legal department. This was back in 1999, and the rest is history for me. Over the course of my 11 years at HP, both the role and the industry changed dramatically, and I was lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time to ride the wave.

- *What do you do for a living right now?*

I am a General Partner and co-founder of UpLevel Ops, LLC, a multi-service Legal Operations consulting firm. We provide a complete range of legal operations support and executive coaching, including legal department strategies, IT solutions, finance and budget guidance, contracts management, talent management and development, benchmarking, best practices and metrics, and outside counsel selection and management.

- *What has been your greatest triumph and your greatest success in the legal services field and what did you learn from each?*

Both co-founding CLOC (the Corporate Legal Operations Consortium) and co-founding UpLevel Ops with my colleague and former GC Jon Hoak are my greatest career successes. With CLOC, I hosted our very first meeting back in 2011 at HP, and helped grow that organization to what it is today – the largest networking organization for Legal Operations professionals in the world. And with UpLevel, in less than a year we're now servicing 15 very active clients and growing quickly. Of course, I've learned a tremendous amount with both ventures. With CLOC, I learned the value in sharing, helping others and then letting go, which wasn't easy. Once I moved from my in-house position to providing legal operations as a service, I could no longer be on the leadership team since CLOC is for in-house professionals only. I had to let go of an organization I helped create, which wasn't easy, but letting go allowed me to fully dedicate myself to UpLevel. With UpLevel, I've learned way too much to list in an interview, but I can tell you I've been stretched way beyond what I thought my abilities were, and pushed well outside of my comfort zone, and I love every second of it.

- *Do you think the legal industry is headed in the right direction, the wrong direction - or which direction?*

It's absolutely heading in the right direction, with in-house law departments demanding the change, solution providers listening and responding accordingly, and the progressive thinkers in law firms offering new and creative services. It took a long time for us to get here, but now the change is happening quickly.

- *Who - or what - inspires you - and why?*

I'm deeply inspired by the great people in my life. My son inspires me to constantly challenge my belief system. He's only 14 but a philosophical kid and he really makes me think differently about my views and ideals. My husband inspires me to be strong. I've never met anybody tougher who just constantly picks himself up by the bootstraps, and he expects the same from me. There is no feeling sorry for yourself in this household. And his level of acceptance is amazing. I learn a lot from him. My business partner, friend

and mentor has taught me so much over the years, and his energy is unbelievable, in every sense of the word. His positivity, respect for others, and physical energy are a constant source of inspiration for me. I'm also inspired by the highly intelligent colleagues and clients I get to work with every day who teach me so much. And lastly, my family, friends and my life in California, and drive to constantly get the most out of that life, are a huge inspiration to me.

- *What advice would you give to the younger generation contemplating law as a career?*

It's actually a great time to go into law. There are so many directions you can go with a law degree, and some in-house departments are even starting to hire right out of law school. Opportunities are changing for lawyers.

- *How ready for change do you think the legal industry is?*

It's way past ready, and I think we're seeing it. We've seen a lot of change in the last 5-7 years already, and that's not going to stop.

- *Is more - or different - leadership required? In what ways?*

From my experience, most GCs and solution providers are already there and leading their teams in the right direction. While some law firms have been avant-garde in their thinking and practices, others have some catching up to do. I've talked to partners who absolutely cannot grasp moving away from the billable hour, even though they understand conceptually that it's not sustainable. I've talked to partners who still say that budgeting for matters is impossible, and who clearly think this whole legal operations and analytics thing just need to go away, but real leaders prepare their teams for change.

- *How deep do you think will be the inroads of technology in the industry?*

Technology is absolutely critical as the delivery of legal services evolves, and I would like to see more integration between firms and their clients in the future for seamless information sharing.

- *In ten years, do you see an industry much as it is - or do you see new players, new technology and an altered state?*

Given the change that's occurred in just the last few years, I think the only thing we can be sure of is that the change will continue. We'll see better tools, availability of information and more alternative service providers. And the "invisible hand" of the market will come into play here where the players who adapt will do well and those who don't will be left behind.

- *Are consultants and lawyers looking increasingly similar? Should the distinction continue?*

Truthfully, I've always looked at lawyers as consultants. Just as I would guide a client on a new technology implementation or process improvement, I would expect a lawyer to help his/her client navigate the law in the best way possible. Why should there be any distinction?

- *What are your thoughts on the increasing availability of data to guide client-side procurement of legal services?*

I think that this is a very promising and overdue development. The recent open letter from 25 prominent GCs saying they are going to compile and share data regarding the performance of law firms is a very positive step forward, but much remains to move from rhetoric to concrete actions by in-house counsel to make sourcing decisions based on prior performance data.

- *Lawyers have typically regulated to keep non-lawyer investors out but that's a two-edged sword these days. What are your thoughts?*

In the long, or maybe even medium run, the regulations in the US will be relaxed to allow non-lawyer investments in law firms as is permitted in most other countries. Given the need for major investments in technology and process improvements by law firms, the present system is not sustainable. Nor is it a good thing for those who need but can't afford legal services -- those services will become more affordable if non-lawyer investors are allowed.

- *What's the one most significant factor that will drive change in your view?*

Demand. The only reason suppliers change what they supply is due to a change in demand. And this is what we're seeing now. In-house legal teams are being asked to do more with less and do be the department of "How To" rather than the department of "No." Because of this, they are making different demands of their suppliers, both from law firms and technology firms.

- *Are we seeing the demise of the "profession" and the real emergence of the "business" of law?*

I'm not sure that these have to be mutually exclusive, but I am positive that we are seeing the real emergence of the business of law. It's becoming critical for in-house departments, and service providers will have to respond accordingly.

- *What do you consider is the greatest challenge facing the industry?*

The greatest challenge facing the industry is the traditional bespoke model is no longer affordable by most individuals and small to medium-sized businesses. There are going to have to be major changes in the way law firms operate, perhaps most significantly moving away from the traditional leverage model which has made a lot of lawyers very wealthy, but no longer serves the needs of most users of legal support.

- *What do you see as the greatest opportunity for the sector looking forward?*

The greatest opportunity is for forward looking law firms to embrace the major changes coming in the practice of law, such as by investing in legal technology, including AI, adopting alternative fee arrangements, especially those based on value-based pricing, and partnering with non-lawyers to perform many tasks now performed by associates so they can lower the cost of services to their clients.

- *Do you think law can improve its track record on diversity and inclusion? How?*

Yes, and they are, both on their own and because GCs are demanding it. I know many of the alternative service providers who are newer have already built diversity into their hiring model. GCs at companies like Uber, HP and Facebook have told their firms that they want to see proof by way of metrics, so firms will have to oblige if they're not doing it already.

- *Will the current regulatory framework around law help or hinder it in the future?*

The current regulatory framework in the US is archaic. It will have to change to allow many tasks that today must be performed by lawyers to be performed by other lower cost resources. This is already occurring in England and Australia, and other countries are not far behind. The users in the us will demand these changes in the next 5-10 years.

- *Who do you think are the greatest influencers on the industry these days?*

I've been lucky enough to meet some really cool influencers in the legal industry, and there are quite a few! I think the "futurists" like Richard Susskind are certainly influential, as are the folks doing work around quantitative finance and machine learning like Dan Katz are also very influential, as are folks offering alternative services in this space.

- *If you had to do it all over again, would you? Or what would you do differently?*

I would do it all over again. I am so happy with my career. If you would have told me 20 years ago that I was going to spend the next 20 years supporting lawyers, I would

have thought you were crazy. I just fell into it, and it's been incredibly rewarding and challenging, and moving to the consulting side has expanded me even more. Talk about being in the right place at the right time.

- *If a law firm was a startup pitching for investors, would you be an investor?*

It depends on the firm. If the law firm was old school, absolutely not. But if they offered alternative services, technology and pricing, absolutely.

Wildcard questions:

- ***If you weren't doing this, what would you be doing?***

If I didn't get my degree in finance & business ultimately leading to this career, I probably would have gone into healthcare. I love biology, health and wellness and at least they've figured out billing codes!

- ***What would you like to be known for?***

Curing cancer or finding a solution to world hunger, but I'll settle for helping to disrupt the legal market.

- ***What would surprise everyone if they knew (they may now).***

I have a secret love affair with tattoos, which you won't see unless we go to the beach together.

- ***What's your favorite hobby or activity outside of law?***

Running, because it's a great stress relief, reading because I love a good story, and knitting because it's a very meditative hobby with beautiful colorful yarns and designs. However, starting my own business has left me with little time to knit, but I still get to listen to audio books while I run.

- ***What's your favorite sports team?***

Truthfully, the only sport I like is basketball, and that's really only if I get to watch the Warriors live. But my husband was a competitive cyclist, so I was just forced to sit through the entire Tour de France. It's slightly more exciting than watching golf.

- ***What's your favorite city?***

Vancouver, B.C. It's clean and beautiful, easy to navigate and close to nature. And who doesn't love Canadians?

- ***What's your favorite food?***

Pizza, but the real stuff – East Coast pizza, preferably from Old Forge, Pennsylvania.

- ***What's your nickname - and why?***

"Fun Steph" which made a lot of sense when I was younger because I was always the life of the party, but now that I'm older and a bit more subdued than I used to be, it's really just ironic at this point.

Stephanie Corey is a co-founder of UpLevel Ops, a consulting firm specializing in providing services for in-house legal departments and law firms. UpLevel Ops provides a complete range of Legal Operations support, including IT solutions, Finance and Budget guidance, Talent Management and Development, Benchmarking, Best Practices and Metrics, and Outside Counsel Selection and Management.

Stephanie is also a co-founder and former executive member of the leading legal operations trade organization CLOC, Corporate Legal Operations Consortium. She is a widely respected veteran in the Legal Ops field.

Most recently, Stephanie has served as the Chief of Staff and Senior Director of Legal Operations at Flex, which has a global legal department of more than 150 people in 15 countries. She has spent the better part of her career providing value-added services to Legal Departments, including building and deploying critical infrastructure to enable them to meet their business priorities. Stephanie's areas of expertise include Information Technology, Finance, Communications and Administration.

Stephanie began her career at Merrill Lynch in Pennsylvania, and after relocating to California, she worked at Bailard, Biehl and Kaiser, an investment firm in Foster City. Once she decided to move into Corporate Finance, Stephanie took a position under the CFO, managing the Finance and Accounting Department at Provident Funding Mortgage Bank.

She later moved to Hewlett-Packard, where she was employed for eleven years as the head Legal Operations Manager, running a large IT and Finance Department. Her most recent role at HP was Chief of Staff to the General Counsel, responsible for managing the daily operations of the Legal Department, working closely with the General Counsel and his reports to develop the strategy for the delivery of technology, finance and administrative solutions.

Stephanie holds a master's degree in Business Administration from Lehigh University, and a bachelor's degree in Economics from Wilkes University.



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