

LEGAL LEADERSHIP: GENERAL COUNSEL ON NAVIGATING THE IMPACT OF
COVID-19

Mary Huser, General Counsel at Poly and Winston & Strawn Partner Kathi Vidal discuss a dramatically different competitive landscape in the wake of COVID-19.

A crucial aspect of general counsels' role is to plan for every eventuality. But how do you prepare for a future that is clouded with fear and unprecedented, global confusion? In this series, we have frank conversations with the world's most prominent women legal chiefs about the short and long-term ramifications of COVID-19, and its economic, operational, and cultural impact on their respective industries.

Mary Huser, Executive Vice President and Chief Legal and Compliance Officer of Poly, the collaboration and communications company formed by the merger of Plantronics and Polycom, speaks with Kathi Vidal, Managing Partner of Winston & Strawn's Silicon Valley office.

Mary, let's start with the pre-pandemic baseline. As the head of the legal and compliance function at Poly, what keeps you up at night?

Poly is a mid-market company, but it faces the same range of internal and external legal issues faced by a company a hundred times its size: Competitors making patent infringement claims, activist investors, other companies or private equity that see you as a potential acquisition target. And then you have all the regulatory compliance requirements, as well as the need to service the legal needs of the various business units. The challenge is that while the issues at a mid-market company are the same as at a much larger company, the budget and resources are not.

The pandemic adds a layer of complexity to all of that. We have to solve all the same problems as before, but in a way that is highly sensitive to the disruption that everyone—employees, customers, suppliers and other stakeholders—is experiencing.

In the face of that range of challenges, how do you prioritize?

Prioritizing isn't an option because everything is urgent. The pandemic means everyone on my team has three full-time jobs. We're highly conscious that we have a huge customer base in government, healthcare, insurance—all sectors that are on the front lines of responding to the crisis. We can't waver in our ability to deliver.

How are you managing the day-to-day business to meet those demands?

You have to tailor your approach to the various parts of the business. In our manufacturing plants, people can't work remotely, so everyone is in full protective gear, six feet apart. But most of the rest of the organization has more flexibility, and because we're a collaboration and communications company, we have all the tools our employees need to work remotely and across platforms. But the pandemic's shift to a total work-from-home environment for many people has placed a premium not just on communication tools but on how people communicate. You have to put more effort into thoroughly but succinctly summarizing information and then over-communicating the content to stakeholders. You do the same thing in your communications with us, in how you provide guidance as issues unfold.

Thank you. We're just trying to make it a little easier to navigate the inbox. As a leader, how are you managing the human aspect of the pandemic?

I'm a big believer in what airlines tell you in their safety instructions: In an emergency, you need to put on your own oxygen mask before helping others. Everyone is under tremendous pressure right now, and it's important for organizations to be flexible. Employees homeschooling their children, for example, are going to have limited availability in the mornings. It's also important to give people a chance to connect and to recharge. So we have virtual happy hours and "spring breaks" where people disconnect from work for a couple of days.

As a woman in a senior legal role, what are your thoughts on diversity and inclusion?

Despite the disruption of the pandemic, we can't lose sight of long-term goals like diversity and inclusion. The pandemic also emphasizes the importance of emotional support resources like women's networks. More broadly, it's important to remember that however difficult things may be for you, someone else is facing greater challenges and can use some help.



MARY HUSER

Vice President and General Counsel, POLY

Mary.Huser@poly.com

Mary Huser is Vice President and General Counsel of Poly. Prior to joining Poly in March 2017, Mary was Vice President and Deputy General Counsel at BlackBerry; Senior Vice President, Legal at McKesson Corporation; and Vice President and Deputy General Counsel at eBay. Before going in-house, she was a litigation partner in the Silicon Valley office of Bingham McCutchen.




KATHI VIDAL

Partner, WINSTON & STRAWN

+1 (650) 858-6425

KVidal@winston.com

Kathi Vidal is a nationally recognized IP litigator and Federal Circuit strategist. In addition to protecting innovative companies through offensive patent actions to preserve their market or through innovative strategies to efficiently resolve defensive patent actions, including in U.S. district courts, the International Trade Commission, and at the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, Kathi advises clients ranging from Fortune 100 companies to start-ups on their portfolios, patent prosecution, inter partes review, covered business methods, trade secrets, trademarks, and other intellectual property matters. Kathi has obtained numerous wins including a preliminary injunction, permanent injunctions, exclusion orders, a contempt finding, attorney fee awards, patent invalidations and treble damages.



Legal Leadership: General Counsel on Navigating the Impact of COVID-19 is brought to you by Winston & Strawn's Women's Leadership Initiative, a cornerstone of the firm's diversity and inclusion programs aimed at increasing hiring, retention, and promotion of female lawyers.

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