

Lorraine Koc Does a Lot of Everything as Vice President and General Counsel of Deb Shops, Inc.

GCC Profile

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By Kenneth Davis

Lorraine Koc has spent almost her entire legal career working in-house. For more than 20 years, she has served as General Counsel for Deb Shops, Inc., a national retail clothing chain for teenage and pre-teen girls. Koc decided early on that building an in-house career would be more satisfying than working at a law firm; she left prominent law firm Fox Rothschild, LLP, in 1985—after working there for only two years—to join Deb Shops.



Lorraine Koc

"When I first started at a firm, I did not find the work tremendously interesting in terms of doing detailed work and carrying out deals," she said. "I thought it would be more interesting to make the deals or to present the problem upfront, and so that's what caused me to consider going in-house."

Koc said that when she first started working at Deb Shops, she was the only attorney at the company. The company now has three attorneys and has tripled its size in the time that she's been there. Deb Shops has more than 330 stores across the country and 3,000-plus employees in 41 states. Most of the stores

are located in shopping malls, which are meccas for Deb Shops' target buyers.

"Our typical customer is probably between the ages of 13 to 18, loves iPods, and always wants to be wearing something new," Koc said. "This is probably why my 15-year-old daughter thinks my job is pretty cool."

Koc discussed some of her duties at Deb Shops:

"My duties include doing, probably, a lot of everything," she said. "I do some corporate work, and I have a substantial amount of employment and leasing responsibilities. More recently, we've been involved in a significant number of intellectual property matters, through our labels and other things. I also handle our national risk management program, and I manage all of our outside counsel."

She said what she enjoys most about her job is the constant variety of issues and matters she handles on a daily basis.

"Every day can be quite different," Koc said. "I can be working in a number of different areas of the law; I can be working with lawyers perhaps 50% of the time, but then the other 50% is probably non-lawyers, business execs, insurance professionals—all that sort of thing. And being that this is a smaller company means that all the lawyers here have substantial responsibility in a variety of areas, so we're not pigeonholed into particular areas."

In addition to the work she does as General Counsel for Deb Shops, Koc is also heavily involved in bar association activities. She is a member of the Philadelphia and Pennsylvania bar associations, as well as the ABA. Koc

currently serves on the board of the Philadelphia-area chapter of the Association of Corporate Counsel (ACC) and is also on the board of the Penn State Abington College Paralegal Program. In addition, Koc is the immediate past president of the National Association of Women Lawyers (NAWL), the oldest national women's bar association.

"During my year as president, we actually ended up issuing the NAWL 2015 Challenge, which aims to break the 50-15-15 problem, whereby women are 50% of the law students but only 15% of the partners and 15% of general counsels," Koc said. "So that was really the main focus—that we issued that challenge so that we can double these numbers by the year 2015."

Koc double-majored in economics and political science as an undergrad at the University of Pennsylvania, graduating with honors in 1979. She received her master's degree in public policy from the University of Pennsylvania in 1980; Koc earned her law degree from Penn Law in 1983. She said that she decided to study law because she thought it would provide her with "an entrée into a number of areas, both legal and business."

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. Well, I have a number of interests. I'm known as a very avid tennis player. I'm trying to learn golf, which I thought would be much easier than it is. I make time to follow my daughter's music career; she plays the flute and the oboe. And I enjoy reading.

Q. What CD was most recently in your CD player?

A. Actually, right now, it's a CD of my daughter's flute and oboe songs. She likes to play Bach.

Q. What was the last magazine you read?

A. *The New Yorker*.

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. *ER*.

A. Lincoln at Gettysburg.

After graduation, Koc joined Fox Rothschild in the firm's Philadelphia office. She said that she primarily handled real estate matters during the two years she was at the firm.

Koc joined Deb Shops' Philadelphia headquarters as general counsel in 1985; she became vice president of the company last year.

She had the following advice for law students interested in pursuing careers as in-house counsel:

About Deb Shops, Inc.

Deb Shops was established in 1932 and was originally known as Joy Hosiery, a leading retailer of foundation garments in and around Philadelphia. Today, the company has evolved to become a leading nationwide junior-apparel retailer under the brand names Deb, CSO, and Tops 'N Bottoms. Deb Shops operates more than 330 stores in 41 states and has more than 3,000 employees.

"Well, [...] first of all, they should get some law firm experience," Koc said.

"Second, they should expand their horizons, meaning that they should inform themselves not only in their substantive area but to be able to reach out and understand some general industry and business trends so that they're well acquainted in the business world, as well."

Koc was born in Gulfport, MS, and grew up in Philadelphia. She is married to a research analyst and said their 25th anniversary is coming up. They have a 15-year-old daughter.

On the net

Deb Shops, Inc.

www.debshops.com/home/default.asp

The National Association of Women Lawyers

www.abanet.org/nawl

University of Pennsylvania Law School

www.law.upenn.edu