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GCC Profile

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By Kenneth Davis

When Ian Thompson joined SeaMobile as general counsel last year, he had an extensive and variegated work history. In addition to practicing law at several different firms, he had also worked as a paralegal/legislative analyst and as a sales representative and assistant winemaker for a winery.

Thompson said his experience working in the business world is beneficial to his job as general counsel because he believes a good general counsel should have solid business acumen in addition to legal skills.

"I think I'm a better lawyer now for having that experience because I got to see what it's like to be on the side of running a business," he said.

Thompson discussed his decision to work in-house:



Ian Thompson

"I've actually spent most of my legal career in law firms," he said. "And the reason why I was interested in the in-house role was, basically, I just liked the idea of being more intimately involved with the business and being closer to the business people."

As General Counsel for SeaMobile—a telecommunications provider of satellite and wireless voice and data services to cruise lines and other maritime installations—Thompson said his duties include a lot of general corporate work, corporate governance, working on board and shareholder relations, and strategic planning with the senior management team. In addition, he said he's basically the HR department, so he assists with the hiring of employees. He also does acquisition work.

"We're a fast-growing company, and we are fairly active on the acquisition front," Thompson said. "So there's a fair amount of acquisition M&A type of work and also financing work, a lot of contract work on customer agreements and also reviewing vendor agreements."

He said two of the more prominent matters he's handled since joining SeaMobile have been his current work on the strategic acquisition of a competitor and helping to negotiate a contract with Holland America Line, which is the company's biggest customer.

Thompson discussed the qualities that he believes an attorney should have in order to be an effective and successful general counsel:

"I think you have to have a skill set where you're good at helping people solve problems, not just identifying them," he said. "We got very good training in law

school to kind of identify issues and identify problems, but I think to be a good general counsel, you have to be able to not just identify them and bring them to people's attention but then also help them think through 'How do I solve this potential problem?'"

Thompson majored in history as an undergrad at Trinity College in Hartford, CT. After graduating in 1991, he went to work as a paralegal/legislative analyst at law firm Williams & Jensen in Washington, DC.

However, the idea of going to law school had been in the back of his mind since his senior year at Trinity College, and in 1994, he entered Washington and Lee University School of Law in Lexington, VA; he graduated with honors in 1997.

Following graduation, he went back to work at Williams & Jensen, this time as an associate. At Williams & Jensen, which is primarily a lobbying firm, he handled legislative and regulatory matters. However, after working at the firm for two years, he decided that he wanted to switch to doing more corporate and transactional work; so in 1999, he joined Perkins Coie, LLP, in the firm's Seattle office and went to work in the corporate department.

After working at Perkins Coie for two and a half years, Thompson took a couple of years off from practicing law to work in the wine industry. His neighbors in Seattle owned a small winery, and Thompson, who was very interested in wine, volunteered to help out at the winery; his neighbors eventually made him an offer to work there as their assistant winemaker and sales representative. He said working at the winery was a great experience.

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. I play in a men's ice hockey league, and I love to cook.

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

A. I don't know if I'm embarrassed to admit this or proud to admit it, but I'm a closet AC/DC fan. I had AC/DC's *High Voltage* in my CD player this morning.

Q. What's the last magazine you read?

A. *Wine Spectator*.

Q. What's your favorite TV show?

A. *Entourage*.

Q. Who's your role model?

A. It's probably not very original, but I've gotta go with my dad.

"It was quite a change," Thompson said. "At the time, it was a great one because I'd been in law school for three years and then working hard as an associate for about four and a half straight years, so it was kind of a nice change of pace for a little while. I think it was valuable for me."

Thompson decided it was time to get back into law after working in the wine industry for two years. He joined Seattle-based boutique firm Beacon Law Advisors in 2003. He had a general corporate practice at the firm and eventually made partner. Thompson said one of his clients was SeaMobile, which he helped get organized prior to its founding in March 2005. He said he helped the company with its corporate formation and its first financing as well as corporate governance and contracts.

"I had been working for SeaMobile for a couple of years when they decided the time was right in the development of the company that they needed a general counsel and made me an offer," said Thompson, who joined SeaMobile in June 2006.

Thompson discussed what he enjoys most about his job:

"The most fun is working with the senior management team on helping to plan and execute the strategy of the company. And I also like working in an environment where there are a lot of smart people who are very entrepreneurial in a fast-growing company."

Thompson said he admires attorneys who are able to keep a level head and give good business advice in addition to good legal advice. He also admires people who started as lawyers but evolved into the business world.

"Someone who comes to mind is a guy named Tom Alberg, here in Seattle, who's with Madrona Venture Group," Thompson said. "He started out as a lawyer at Perkins Coie, my old firm, and ended up going in-house at McCaw Cellular and ended up being general counsel there, and now he's a private equity investor in Seattle. He's basically evolved through the world, and I really admire the ability to do that."

About SeaMobile, Inc.

Established in March 2005, SeaMobile is a venture formed by former high-level executives from DIRECTV and McCaw Cellular Communications (now AT&T). It is the dominant global service provider of at-sea wireless voice, data, television, Internet, broadband satellite, and other communication services for more than 300 maritime vessels, including cruise ships, ferries, yachts, container ships, and offshore platforms. Since its inception, SeaMobile has acquired two other satellite-based companies. In May 2006, it acquired satellite industry leader Maritime Telecommunications Network (MTM). And in December 2006, SeaMobile acquired Geolink, a pioneer and leading provider of satellite-based broadband services serving the European market.

Thompson had the following advice for law students who are considering in-house careers:

"My advice would be to try to find a job, whether it be with a firm or otherwise, where you get exposure to a wide range of legal issues," he said. "Not necessarily becoming a specialist right from the get-go, but where you can learn to identify issues in a wide range of things and where you can learn to hone your skills in being a problem-solver and helping businesspeople manage risk and solve problems."

Thompson was born and raised in Westchester County, NY. He's married and has an 18-month-old daughter.

He discussed one of the professional goals he'd like to accomplish in the next few years:

"I'd like to be part of SeaMobile as it grows into a global leader in our sector."

On the Net

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www.seamobile.com

Washington and Lee University School of Law

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Perkins Coie, LLP

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