In-House Legal: Uncovered: Kevin Agnew

### In House Legal Uncovered explores what it takes to make it in house

Michael Sachs: Welcome to In-House Legal Uncovered, a Major Lindsey and Africa podcast exploring what it takes to make it in house.

Michael Sachs: Hello, everyone. Welcome to another episode of in House Legal Uncovered in 2024. My name is Michael Sachs, and I'm a partner in major Lindsay in Africa and our in house counsel recruiting group. The theme of this podcast continues to be candid in engaging conversations with leading individuals in the legal industry. And so far this year, we've spoken to a few general counsels with great insights in the industry, how they've become successful, and what the future is going to be like, for lawyers and their teams. And every now and then, I like to mix it up and talk with other individuals who play a key role in the industry. We've talked with HR leads, we've talked to board members, and recently the head of career services at a top ten ranked law school. This week, I really have the pleasure to speak to someone who I've known for a few years now who has a very unique but absolutely critical role.

### Kevin Agnew is the director of attorney career services at Latham and Watkins

Please welcome the director of attorney career services at Latham and Watkins, Kevin Agnew, to the podcast. Kevin, thank you for joining me, Mike.

Michael Sachs: I always love talking to you and it's great to be here and, really look forward to our discussion today.

Michael Sachs: Absolutely. I am very excited to talk with you as well. Let me just get your background out of the way and then we can focus on our conversation. So, ah, you have a very diverse work experience in the legal field. Again, Kevin, currently serves as the director of attorney career services at Latham and Watkins, a position he has held, since May 2019. For those who don't know, I'm sure most people do. Latham and Watkins is an international law firm with about 3000 lawyers. Kevin runs the firm's career design program and oversees the global alumni program. prior to this, Kevin began a stint as an adjunct professor at Northwestern School of Law and worked as a career link coach at Kirkland and Ellis. He's also worked as an assistant director of law career services at DePaul University and an assistant regional counsel at the Social Security Administration, which I did not know. Kevin, started his legal career as an attorney at Latham and Watkins, so he is strong roots there. by way of education, Kevin completed his bachelor's degree in cultural anthropology at the University of Iowa in 2001 and then went on to obtain another thing I did not know about you. You obtained a master's degree in international relations and affairs from the University of New South Wales in Sydney in 2003, and following that, he attended Northwestern, for law school and graduated in 2007. That is a great, diverse background. So I love it. I saw UNSW, and I actually didn't know what that was until I had.

Michael Sachs: To click on it. Yeah, fun here in my life. kind of in reverse chronological order there, Mike. Exactly.

### Just walk through your career a little bit

Michael Sachs: We won't talk about what hospital you were born at, but on that note, that's a great segue to kind of our first kind of starter question. So just walk through your career a little bit. How'd you get from, sort of there to here, so to speak?

Michael Sachs: Yeah. Well, thanks, Mike. It's fun kind of hearing all those different experiences and trying to think about how they kind of represent my career path. you know, I think there's kind of two ways to talk about your professional life. There's the bio, which is kind of the resume, which is, you know, kind of growing up, my father was a lawyer. I looked like my dad. I was always fairly, you know, I liked arguing. Frankly, I liked arguing. And I was kind of a liberal arts type person. And I think I was kind of brought up to be a lawyer. It so happens also, though, that my mother was a community college professor in psychology. And as I think about the kind of the macro narrative of my story, I think blending those two backgrounds, law and psychology, is really where I ended up. But like a lot of m people, that I think become lawyers. At a place like Latham Oakins, I followed what I call kind of the vertical achievement model of career decision making. I tried to do good in high school, so I go to a good college. Tried to go to a good college, so I could go to a good law school, try to do great in law school, so I could end up at a place like Latham. And that strategy was great. unfortunately for me, once I got to Latham, I loved Latham, but I was like, I don't think I love being a lawyer. that reality sunk in, and I think demanded a little bit of a different career decision framework, which is what I call kind of an alignment career decision framework, which is what interested in what did I want my life to look like both personally and professionally. And then over the last 15 years, have tried to move my day to day kind of more alignment with kind of what I like to do, which ultimately is meeting with individual human beings and figuring out who they are and trying to help them get there. And so I think that process of moving from lawyer to whatever it is, and we'll talk about kind of what I do now has been in that kind of alignment

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Michael Sachs: mode, trying to learn about kind of who I am and, the skills that I want to bring to bear in my day to day life. And then trying to have that come to a reality. And kind of what I do now is maybe more reflective of kind of, kind of who I am at my core in terms of my professional identity.

Michael Sachs: Right. We do want to talk about what you do now, but let's give a couple other, pre questions to get there.

### One of the things I've noticed about you is your natural curiosity

So one of the things I've thought about you have known you, I think, eight years, seven years, ten years, whatever it's been, you also have a great natural curiosity. Like, that's one thing I've noticed about you. I'm not the only person who said that about you. I know you mentioned your mother was in the psychology field. I mean, how did this just develop over time? Has it developed? If I had known you in college or high school, would I have said the same m thing? Are you the same person? Tell us a little bit about that.

Michael Sachs: Well, that's nice. I think curiosity's, I don't have that many virtues, but curiosity, I think, is one of the things that is a virtue of mine. you know, my father, I actually have to kind of go back. I remember when I was a young boy, and he would take me out to McDonald's for breakfast on Saturdays. And he would always bring a large map. And we would just sit there and he would point to a country. And he had a naturally curious mind. And we would just talk about places he's been and the stories that he had. And I was always, I think, the romanticism of looking at a big map and hearing my dad talk about his life. I think really, Washington kind of maybe a foundation for some of the natural curiosity I have. but then my mother had this. So my dad was this adventurer and had interest in places and travel. My mother was somebody that was deeply interested in people and was raised by being raised, I was born in 1978. And being raised by a psychologist in the eighties. My mom would put me to bed and say, kevin, how do you feel? And I'd say, oh, I feel happy. And will she say, no, Kevin, how do you really feel? And so kind of having to explore the depths of my emotions, m and I think kind of that it's nice to reflect on them. Both of them have passed away. And kind of, when I think of who I am now as a middle aged man, I think, a lot of my curiosity is rooted in kind of their natural kind of curiosity. I do think as I became a more professional person, studying anthropology, studying religion, studying international politics, studying law. Just fantastic, you know, kind, of fantastic major. A fantastic kind of academic, pursuit that just was an outgrowth of my natural curiosity. And then now, as I work with human beings. And the myriad of ways that they present, I'm endlessly fascinated by the human experience. And the fact that I get to engage with people on a day to day. About kind of who they are, what's important to them, and how that kind of takes shape in their professional life is something that, frankly, is just a well that never runs dry for me.

Michael Sachs: Yeah, that's great. my son was really into geography for a while, so he would also have these maps. He's unfortunately, moved on to other things, like Star wars and the planets and space and things like that. Rock climbing.

### You decided that the practice of law wasn't for you

so you had this period. So you started at Latham. you're there for a few years. You already said maybe you decided that the practice of law wasn't for you. And then it sounds like you went to a couple different roles until you got the role at Kirkland. And then kind of your career, in this position kind of took off. So take us through those few years there. What was the process like to figure that out? Some people decide. I want to give a long question, but some people decide for them for one reason, other people for another reason. Like, what was that decision like, and how did you kind of move it forward the next couple of years until you found something you really loved?

Michael Sachs: Well, thanks, Mike. I, will say that that process of figuring out what to do was very scary and deeply, disorienting for a long time. And I was raised, I think, and had an identity as kind of this successful young kid and always did well in school. I think when I recognized that maybe this line that I had taken professionally. Wasn't going to be something that was sustainable for me, that was very, very scary and very hard. To the point where I remember, being invited to a family Christmas party shortly after I quit my job. With no job lined up. I pretended to be sick because I was so embarrassed and uncomfortable that I didn't have a professional direction. And so as I talk about these grand virtues of alignment, career decision making, and finding a role that feels connected to yourself, I don't want to minimize just how difficult that experience was. And so for anybody out there that's thinking of making maybe, a career pivot or a career transition, I recognize that that can be very uncomfortable and very difficult. I, think for me, again,

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Michael Sachs: when I kind of started my practice of law, I loved law school. I felt a little bit like, while I was dedicated to trying to do a good job in my role as a lawyer, I always felt like I was kind of metaphorically speaking my second language. It just felt forced. It felt like I was swimming upriver. And when I recognized that, I think, as I mentioned, it was scary. but then, I ultimately decided that if I was going to write a professional story that I was inspired by and I felt connected to, I had to take some drastic action. As I mentioned, I ended up quitting my job with no job, with the idea that I'm going to have to kind of figure out what the hell it was that I want to do in my professional life. And I think now connecting to that experience, what, I realized is I had this legal training that I wanted to use. I had some natural curiosity with respect to kind of people and kind of their professional lives. And I started thinking about when I had free time, where did I go, what did I do? And I found myself, I was going back to the law school to talk to the students I was inviting, or, I was accepting invitations to sit on panels to talk about professional development. And I also reached out to my former law school career counselor, who happened to be working at DePaul for some guidance. And he said after a conversation, it turned into a little bit of an interview and I took a job in the career services office. Now, I went from a fairly high paid associate at a premier law firm to a very like, a contract employee in a career services office. So the status demarcation was fairly significant. But when I started talking to students about their careers, I went from speaking my second language as a lawyer to now what I call speaking my first language professionally, where I just felt, wow. I felt energized by it and I felt ambitious about trying to kind of get great at this line of work. And, while all the fears about pay and status and recognition and maybe some of the ways that, I was raised to kind of, to index pretty high, maybe weren't really apparent at that time in my professional life, it did feel great to be connected to a line of work that I really felt inspired by.

Michael Sachs: Your point about how hard it is to kind of be without the net, I would say the same thing to people. I always encourage them, but in the net, and I'll just tell my quick anecdote is that I had left and I was basically out of work. For, like, two months as I figured out what I wanted to do. And then when I joined MLA, you know, you're starting at the bottom at the end of the day. So I was just starting to make. And I wasn't making much, and so I probably felt this more. And so my wife was working, and she had a party with people at our house. It was, like, at 05:00 and I came. Bye. And I just met my wife, and I was just meeting all of her friends for the first time. And her boss came up to me at this party. I just made an appearance, and she turned to me, and I'm sure it wasn't exactly like this, but this is my recollection. She turned to me and said, so, mike, are you, like, you know, working these days?

Michael Sachs: Yeah.

Michael Sachs: and it just shot right. Right into my chest at the end of the day, and I was still 16 years later. I still remember that point.

Michael Sachs: So, yeah, that resonates so deeply with Megan and have gone through that. I think it instilled in me this really deep understanding, and it relates to the work I do now is our careers are very personal. they say a lot about us. And kind of as you march through your professional life, feeling like you're connected to the work that you do, kind of, no matter what it is, is something that becomes a huge identity marker. and when that's in a little bit, when that's in kind of flux or you're kind of in the white water of, trying to figure out what you want, one of the things that I try to bring to the work I do is a level of compassion that, these are very, you know, very emotionally charged, conversations and decisions, because our careers are just so. So personal to the way that we think about ourselves.

Michael Sachs: So let's talk. That's great. Segue.

### You run a global program that helps Latham associates figure out career goals

So what, I have an idea of what you've done, having had a conversation with you over the years, but what is your job like? What's the day to day like? Tell us what you're. What you're doing, and, you know, who you're talking to. What do they need from you? What kind of things? You're like, what just, what is that like? And I know these days you're running a program as well. So, Yeah. What's the program doing? What's. Yeah, tell us about that.

Michael Sachs: So, you know, I wear a couple different hats, as you mentioned, at Latham. but in kind of the career hat, I run a global program and manage several, people that works with three specific audiences. we work with Latham attorneys. that's one audience that we work with. We work with Latham alumni. That's another audience. And then we work with this other audience, which is kind of select friends of the firm, oftentimes kind

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Michael Sachs: of clients of the firm that. And we work with those populations in a couple different capacities. One capacity that we work with is what I call almost conceptual career coaching. You know, what do I want out of my professional life? I think there's a great fiction, particularly for our associate population. A lot of people think either they know, you know, the fiction is, you know, you want to be partner or, you know, you want to leave. I actually think 90% of us live in this ambiguous middle where we're trying to figure out what the hell do we want to do with our professional lives. And so those conversations, and we're allowed to have in a confidential career coaching setting, which is trying to help people develop a professional north Star, whether that's at Latham. Hey, I have, career coaching, and I decide I want to pursue kind of progression at Latham, or I decide that I want to leave Latham, and then we'll help them achieve their goals outside of Latham. the other kind of aspect of the work that we do is when people know what they want. I know I want to be partner. I know I want to leave. We'll kind of work with them in more tactical capacity, how to develop a plan internally that puts you in the best position to progress. Or if they decide they want to leave, how do we coach them around job search advice. And oftentimes that's where we connect, Mike, with people that are maybe thinking about moving their careers to an in house market, maybe a career pivot. Like me, we help them from the blocking and tackling of job searching, you know, resumes, LinkedIn profiles, but then also an interview coaching, maybe helping them with compensation advice. So those are the kind of career coaching conversation I have from the very conceptual to the more tactical. And then obviously, at a, firm as large as Latham and now kind of running a team, I'm also supporting the people on my team, as they navigate their work and setting up programs and doing some of, kind of the logistics that you have to do when you're running global programs.

Michael Sachs: So I can imagine, but I don't know the things that would make this sort of, a passion project and make it fun and make it engaging, and I can guess some of the things that would make it challenging. But what, what are those like? What are the, what are the, what are the things that you, when you talk, you know, certain things, you're like, wow, that was, that was great. I felt great about that. And what are the things that were like, okay, a bit more challenging that, you know, just walk us through that a little bit.

Michael Sachs: Yeah. You know, the way that I. I think the core of these programs that I'm, you know, get to be a part of at a large global law firm, it gets, with the numbers of people that we engage in, it can be easy and tempting in my role to start thinking of people in the abstract. Right. They're just names. And I think the core of our programs, we have to keep it human centered, where people reaching out to us, looking for support, that's a great responsibility for us, and a great opportunity to help people kind of figure out how to navigate their professional lives. And so I think the core joy of my job is, when done well, I really feel connected to a real human being as they try to figure out what they want to do with a big part of their life. And the successes of when they feel like they were supported and offered an environment to really explore their professional direction is when I feel most connected to the work that I do. I also think one of the great things that I'm allowed to do is to create programs. And the creative aspect, Latham gives me a long leash to bring, some creative, juices to the work that I do. So, as an example, one of the things that we're doing more of now is small group coaching. and so one of the things that we did for our alumni this year is we did a small group coaching program for alums that have been out of the workforce for over three years. And we're thinking of entering back into the workforce and led by a couple of my teammates, this was a five session, 5 hours of material with this audience that was going. That's a big decision. To reenter the workforce. And being able to be creative in that space, I think, was just and touching the lives of these people at kind of a critical juncture is a time where I felt the creativity and the work that we did was meaningful to real human beings. like any jobs, there are complications. I would say one of the difficulties is just how big Latham is. And so, we're working in any given year with 600 individuals. That's an enormous number of people, to work with when the core mission is to try to make the work personal. And so trying to navigate around just the global nature of Latham, we

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Michael Sachs: always say the sun never sets in the Latham world. that can be, a logistical challenge. and then, frankly, another thing is having the firm kind of understand the totality of what we do. And so the ongoing kind of messaging to make sure that the resources that we offer and the support that we can provide our attorneys isn't kind of reduced to kind of a one dimensional service. It's more, making sure that people understand that it's connected to kind of a holistic strategy.

Michael Sachs: Yeah. And you and I talked about this over the years. There's some similarities in what we're doing and what you're doing. When you talk about how busy it is, that resonates, because for us, obviously, we have our clients that are engaging us researches, and that's the ones who are paying the bills, and that's the ones that are. But we also have a lot of candidates. Probably some of the same people you're talking to are reaching out, and sometimes they just want to talk because they're networking. They just want ideas. And then, at least for me, it's probably slightly different for you, but probably a little bit. You don't know what they're really looking for. And are they, For me, are they just looking for a new job and they're just networking, and they're very comfortable in their own skin and in their minds, and they don't really. Or do they really want to break it down and go all the way to the real base levels and build back up? And sometimes, in my view, you almost miscalculate. Sometimes you just assume one thing or the other. No, no. This is what this person's looking for, and it's hard. And then, of course, would you say about you're juggling all these things, too, and you want to give everyone as much time as possible, but, there are realities of that, too.

Michael Sachs: Yeah. Mike, one of the things I've always liked about your approach to the work that you do is you have kind of a broad, kind of holistic approach, both on the kind of capital c client side and then on the candidate side, but trying to figure out kind of how to best navigate all the equities that are at stake is something that can be a little bit of a juggling act for it sounds like in your professional life. and also in my professional life.

### What do you think about the state of the legal industry from your perspective

Michael Sachs: So, so, you're talking all these lawyers. So tell us, what's the, what's the average law firm, in house lawyer thinking these days? What's the, Take it. Take us. What's what are they, are they, are they happy, sad? You know, miserable, overworked, ambitious, excited? what's. From your perspective? I know there's different stories for different people, but what's, what do you, what's the state of the legal industry? Ooh.

Michael Sachs: I mean, this is probably a fodder for a long conversation. You know, kind of, I think a couple ways to answer. I think all of the above. you know, I think, there's great diversity in the, in the legal industry. I don't think there's a monolithic way to kind of give, a lay of the land. I do think, you know, of our kind of lawyer population, so our internal lawyers. I do think there is more openness to the variety of career paths that are possible. And there's more sunlight into some of those conversations, as opposed to maybe what those conversations look like as an associate 15 years ago, where even internally, if you were having some questions, I think you couldn't externalize those around the firm to say, maybe you're thinking about another career path. As an example, our summer associates this year, one of the things we did, we brought in, at six different offices, alumni, to come in and speak to them about what they're doing, to say, hey, there's a great possibility, even if you don't stay at Latham. That was a little bit controversial, maybe even ten years ago, to give sunlight onto what. And so I think that's been a really nice, breath of fresh air to create a little bit more of a, kind of a real kind of conversation about people's careers. I do think the legal world, whether you're in house or whether you're at a law firm, or whether you're in a capacity law, tangential, like us, it is a high stress profession. And how one stays healthy and, emotionally centered, I think, is a battle that is just part of this industry. And I do think there are initiatives that firms, are doing, well to try to put that, and support people. One of the things that I try to work on is how to not make kind of well being separate part of your professional life, how to actually integrate a sense of well being into how you think about a sustainable career. Because the folks that I see that burn out, oftentimes, they're the best lawyers, they are the people that have fantastic reputations, but they're just kind of like white knuckling it to the point where eventually they go, like, kind of screw it, like, I gotta let go. And it's kind of that idea, if we could get to that person beforehand, this can still be a wonderful professional life for them. But thinking about kind of your well being and that this is much more of a marathon as opposed to a sprint, is, I think, where people, people do things, really well, and have maybe happier,

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Michael Sachs: more successful professional lives that are durable. I do think from a macro perspective, I'm interested. I think there is particular at the senior levels, I think there is a lot of people that are in the market for new opportunities. and, what I'm seeing is, there's just a great deal of talent, that is out there that's interested and curious about new opportunities, but there's not, necessarily like, the market goes up and down, and, ah, so from a macro perspective, you probably know more than me on that, but from a lawyer perspective, I think there's a lot of diversity within, in terms of people's professional experience.

Michael Sachs: Yeah, I mean, your point about that, it's a marathon, not a sprint, is a great one, and I'm sure I fell into this, and most people do. When you're like a third year associate, God, it just seems like if somebody told you this will happen in a year, it just seems like an eternity to you. And you make certain decisions when you're a second year or third year that you just think about it in terms of the short term. And either some people don't make the sacrifice, and maybe they should have, because that would have paid off, or they do make certain sacrifices that do have, maybe an undue effect on their lives, and they don't realize it at the end of the day. They should have looked at sort of wellbeing going forward. And that's one thing I think a lot of younger lawyers don't think enough about is like, thinking about, okay, I'm 28 years old right now. What are. Where do I want to be when I'm 48? And that's so hard, because it's hard. When I was 28, I probably would have just rolled my eyes, too.

Michael Sachs: It's very hard. It's incredibly hard. One of the things that I think, at least in the Nat show we do, is how do you. So that question, where do you want to be? Kind of in 20 years, is such an existential, such almost an amorphous question that one of the things that I think career coaching can do is give frameworks for how to even approach a question like that, to put it into digestible chunks so that it feels more present, so that you can make professional decisions that are kind of aligned with where you want to go. But that question of, like, where do you want to be in 1015 years? You know, I have no idea where I want to be in 15 years. I, need kind of a framework for engaging you, know, a thought process or thought exercise like that. And I think that's one of the things that we can do. And frankly, one of the things that I think has, been a really nice development in attorney professional development at law firms is supporting our associates, and how to address some of those questions, not just teaching them the, you know, depositions and diligence logs, but also supporting them on the, hey, what are the, skills and values that you want to bring to bear in your professional life? And then maybe where can that best materialize at the, at the law firm? I think that has been a nice transition where a little bit more holistic professional support, not just kind of the nuts and bolts of being a lawyer. but I think, like anything, when you start asking existential questions, you can start getting some existential dread. and so, how to do that in a way that feels, momentum building and not, suffocating, I think is the great challenge of, posing some of those questions.

Michael Sachs: You kind of alluded.

### 90% of people don't know if they want to be a law firm lawyer

So I have a question for you, and you kind of alluded to it earlier, which is most people don't. 90% of people don't really know if they want to be a law firm lawyer for their life or not. So it's interesting, when I talk to people, I always ask them to think about whether, law firm life would be more up their alley or an in house life. As years have gone on, I've kind of wondered if there really are certain lawyers that are more cut for a law firm or more cut for an in house, or is it more about maybe just the choices you make? And many lawyers could succeed at both, if they decided to wear a certain mindset for a while and if that was comfortable with them. I don't know if you have a thought on that. If you feel like people can kind of do both, very easily. Most people, or certain people should kind of just choose a certain path along the way. I don't. I don't know.

Michael Sachs: Sometimes, yeah, I mean, I think it's a great question. You know, my perspective is, you know, one, I do, I do think the language of, quote, m unquote, making it at a law firm actually is a, is a, frame that I try to steer away from, because, you know, type a ambitious people. It's like the metaphor of like, did you cross the finish line? It's your success, or you're, if you didn't do that, you're kind of a failure. So I, what I know, because I don't, if I meet somebody that's a wildly successful partner, but miserable, I view that as like, oh, you like, didn't make it. Like, that's kind of sad to see. And if I see somebody that, so, you know, one of the things that I do is try to figure out, you know, as somebody kind of thinks about the life that they want to live, what path, is best aligned, with, kind of where they want to go. I do think there frankly are, though, probably some commonalities of personality traits with respect to the people that succeed at. Internally at a large law firm and m maybe people that find

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Michael Sachs: more success, externally. at the end of the day, a large private law firm, you are in the client service business. and the problems that are brought to your table, you know, really being responsive to those, being, somebody that, can kind of parachute into a problem and have a really quick understanding and gain trust, I think is something that somebody's going to have to do. I also think just the raw number of hours over a straight period of years is something that, you know, is really essential, and kind of that stress level to be able to find equanimity within that stress. I don't want to minimize the stress, though, that comes with being a very successful in house lawyer. I think there is a fiction, amongst particularly associates that, oh, there's this like, very stressful path at a large law firm and then a more kind of, easy going path or whatever the word is, in house. And I actually don't think that's true. I think in house is incredibly challenging, intellectually invigorating. I do think it probably lends well, for people that really like to partner with a core group of people, really take and understand the business strategy, maybe have a different relationship to, being the center of, kind of the profit center. I do think there might be some, some, differences in terms of people that succeed, there. All that being said, I think the hallmarks of a successful person is hard work, dedication to the problems that are doing, treating people well. and kind of understanding the kind of where you fit into kind of the lifecycle of the matter you're working on are fairly universal, kind of, no matter what you do. And my guess is there's a lot of transferability of, who could be successful where it's just a matter then of kind of personal decision making.

Michael Sachs: Yeah, that's probably right. I think I thought at some point it might be different, but when I see, I'm sure there are many general counsels, if you told them, okay, your new path is now going back to private practice and doing that. I don't want to minimize it either, but I think they could adapt if they wanted to do that. And I'm sure there are people, there are people I know who are law firms who have been there, and people say, oh my God, that person's gonna, was born, they're gonna retire there. But some of those people I know and I know they've sniffed out in house jobs before as well. They just, they just didn't. Whatever. So I agree with you on that.

### You're an executive coach; what are the hallmarks of a good executive coach

So you are, as I was looking at your background again, of course, remind me, you're an executive coach. You do this. I've always been really fascinated by this because I talked to so many lawyers and I think to themselves, myself, this person would do well with an executive coach. There probably are some people who think, I don't know if I, I don't know if that will really help me. I can imagine there are ones that aren't that good. like, what are the hallmarks of a good executive coach for you and what's the value you think that that person can bring a, like what's the, for people out there who are maybe thinking about it, what's the, what's the, what would you want to tell them?

Michael Sachs: Yeah, you know, I think this world of coaching is a world that is in the process of shaping itself and branding itself to the people that are availing themselves to coaching. And I think if you look at kind of the business world, I think a lot of our, top CEO's, a lot of people that are in that realm as part of their professional maintenance, they seek out executive coaches, whether it be to help them with kind of their leadership ability, maybe succession planning, maybe communications coaching. I do think the law is a little bit, lags behind a little bit with respect to kind of how it fits in. And I think there's probably structural reasons and cultural reasons that are associated with that. I think the value of executive coaching is giving an individual a forum to explore how they can better themselves on issues that they can identify that they want to improve on. I think a good executive coach creates an environment where the person that they're working with can identify areas that they want to explore and then offer an environment where questions are asked and frameworks, are relayed that can help somebody level up into the areas that they want to, you know, they want to get better at. Frankly, I, think a good executive coach should have radical kind of compassion. This is a little bit my thing, and an ability to empathize with the worldview of their client. I think, ah, of course there's always exceptions, but I think the process of good executive coaching is going to be client led, not coach led. and a good coach will try to really understand the issues that the person is confronting and then create an environment for them to, kind of move forward. And I think that takes a level of compassion, a level of empathy, on a level of kind of, frankly, kind of a judgment free kind of approach. that said, sometimes very what I call hard truths,

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Michael Sachs: where you do have a judgment might be, something that you can, kind of present if that trust has been established, with the client and, you know, but again, not all executive coaching. Sometimes it's very narrow. It can be a very specific. I have trouble managing, the people that report to me, and it can be a very narrow thing. Other can be kind of a more conceptual, who am I as a leader, or where do I want to go and how do I want to get there? A little bit more conceptual. So I. Defining what the need is, is really important.

Michael Sachs: Yeah, I mean, it's one of the things, at least I recommend anybody who's in that position. I'm going to associate general counsel at x, y and z, or I'm an income partner at this firm and thinking about x, y and z and trying to figure this out a little bit, I just feel like there's so much value there that comes from it. But again, not knowing what really goes on behind the scenes.

### Latham has a unique internal coaching program where employees talk about their employers

So one of the things I've always been fascinated with your job, too, is that you have this service that the firm puts out there. People come to you and they're going to reveal some of their thoughts about their current, employer, who's also your employer. At the end of the day, that's super unique. you know, if I just said, you know, I don't want to mention names of companies, but if, you know, some of the largest companies in the world had that, I think people would be like, wow, how does that work? Are they super worried about confidential? Do they sit there with their people can see me with their arms clenched. They're not sure what they can say and what not to say. Or have they already made the decision? Like, what is that? What's that? Give and take, like, a little bit?

Michael Sachs: Yeah. It's interesting. I do think there's been some evolution. When I started this, kind of position at another law firm, I think there was at the time, in that kind of a lifecycle, I think there was more kind of just general worry of, like, this is so unique. Like, what is. Is this really confidential? You know, is there kind of an oz behind the curtain that's like, be listening to our conversation? Is there a. Is there a hotline right after we talk, that you go off and tell the managing partner that so and so said this? I think the growth and success of some of these internal coaching programs at large law firms and the way they're being incorporated into the associate experience, I think there's a little bit more trust now that there is a zone of confidentiality, and part of a successful program will be able to articulate why the need for confidentiality is important to the success of the program, and how it's aligned with kind of the business objectives of the firm. you're right, though. People do come and talk about very sensitive things. I would say, even in the work that I do, about 20% of the conversations that I have have some noticeable emotion or tears or. And again, it goes back to the idea that our professional lives are very personal. at least at Latham, the kind of zone of confidentiality, which is part of every aspect and even starts a, relationship, is we define what confidentiality means. and it's basically, I report, and my team reports to nobody at the firm who we work with. The contents of our conversations are totally confidential. There are some narrow exceptions that are pretty standard in an employment law context, whether you're harmed yourself or somebody else, or that there's some allegations of kind of, employment malfeasance, but for that, we keep it confidential. And the way that I articulate that, either to the person I'm working with, is if somebody feels that their confidentiality has been violated, the program would die in a vine. No one would talk to us because they would feel that this isn't on the level. And then secondly, for our partnership, who's like, hey, what is this? What are people talking to you about? Socializing the importance of that confidentiality with, hey, we really want our attorneys to be making really good decisions, about their professional lives. We want people to feel supported, it's good for our morale, frankly. It ends up being good for our business, it's good for our recruiting. And if people end up leaving, they feel that they've had a wonderful experience where they can use it as a launching pad to the next part of their career. And so this isn't just a crass, hey, we're doing this to feel good about ourselves. There is also a core business imperative for the confidentiality that when you just are frank and direct with people of all constituencies, people are like, yeah, that makes good deal of sense. what I also will say is if somebody is really nervous about confidentiality, this might just not be the right program for them. They might want to pursue somebody externally and get support, and we'll maybe even help them find somebody if that becomes, hey, I just can't get, I can't feel comfortable in this zone. I just feel too awkward and uncomfortable. So sometimes it just might not be the right form for everybody.

Michael Sachs: Is that how a place like Latham kind of views the success of the program, which is sort of like they're hearing from their people, they're hearing from you. They're feeling like, is the service we wanted to provide working for people or feeling. Feeling comfortable? And that's kind of how they view the success of it? I mean, just, is there other metrics?

Michael Sachs: Is it? Yeah. So kind of the value of the program and how it's articulated, I really try to take a holistic approach of, where the value

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Michael Sachs: lies. And so one, at the beginning, recruiting, you know, a lot of our recruits, as I said, you know, despite even what they may say at an interview, they are saying, I don't know exactly what I want in my career. The fact that we can say we have a program that allows you to explore your professional life is something that our recruits are attracted to. So there's value there for our attorneys. having a place that you can go and discuss your professional life in a confidential manner is very good for morale. It's doing right by our folks because we're supporting them. If they decide to stay, they've made an affirmative decision, not just let inertia take place. And so that feeling of I'm an agent in my career and I'm an active participant in that decision is really good. If somebody ends up deciding to leave and they're getting coaching from us, they leave. And there are brand ambassadors, even if they go up in a yoga studio, I mean, the fact that they will say, hey, I saw that you were at Latham. What was it like there's value in them saying it was a great place to work? And obviously, this isn't the only program that would go into, that testimonial, but this is an addition to the value that we get from our brand ambassadors. Then, of course, Latham's, over almost 2000 of our alumni work at almost 750 of our clients. That's an enormous, part of our business strategy where we want people that decide affirmatively that they want to move in house. We want them to have had a good experience and feel like they were welcome into our alumni community. And so when I think of the value, it's kind of holistic, from recruiting to kind of attorney morale to brand ambassadors to alumni, to people making concrete decisions that they want to go to a firm. And so in terms of the metrics we use, it's how many people are engaging the program? how many people that end up being partner engaged the program because that's showing value? And then finally, of the people that end up ultimately deciding to use Latham as a launching pad to their next part of their professional life, how many engaged the program and what was their experience like? I will say back to one of the earlier questions about, the challenges associated with, running large law firm programs is how to make that quantitative data speak to the human experience. And so the value, we always report on what was somebody's qualitative experience of engaging the program. So we have testimonials and whatnot. And one of the things that I do in my year in reporting is what's the metaphor for what? The program, the career program that I'm a part of. What is it? It's in what I call we're a bridge. We're a bridge for our attorneys, into partnership. You know, they come, they get coaching, they move into partnership. We are a bridge to the alumni experience. If they end up wanting to leave, we help them leave. We're abridged to that. We're abridged. Then back to Latham, too, where if you're an alum that wants to still connect with Latham and your colleagues, we'll offer lifelong support to you. And so you're a bridge back to Latham, and then we're a bridge to our client experience. And so that bridge metaphor is really kind of the, how I kind of frame out the value that we have.

### I've always been infatuated with the role that you have

Michael Sachs: I'm sure I mentioned this to you in the past. I've always been sort of infatuated, with the role that you have. I've always thought it's so interesting and engaging, and there's some similarities when we do some key differences, obviously, and, so interesting to me. So I imagine other people also hear about this, and they think that's really great, and that's really interesting. So if they were looking to get into a program like yours, I don't mean how to apply to late them, but what would you tell them? There's a third year associate right now at some firm or somebody who just laughed like you. What's the advice? You tell them, hey, if you're interested in something like this, here's kind of the things I think you should think about.

Michael Sachs: Yeah, thanks. It really is. It's been fascinating to kind of watch these roles develop and get professionalized. You know, I would have, you know, offer a perspective that's kind of aligned with kind of this particular framework. And it starts with introspection. I would ask the person, what are the things that they're interested in, what makes them curious about kind of the work that I do. what are the things that just kind of resonate with you? And that process of intro inspection is the first step in kind of this alignment, decision making that I'm a big proponent of. And so it starts with, who am I? And why am m I interested in this? And then it leads to, from introspection, what I call outer spection, which is, I think, a fake word. But it's okay, you know, who you are and what you're interested in.

### Go talk to people that actually do it and learn about what their day looks like

Now let's go talk to people that actually do it and learn about what their day to day is like. Learn about exactly the questions you're asking. What does a great day

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look like? What does a difficult day look like? You know, Mike and my family at the dinner table, not every night, but we do Rosebud and Thorn. Rose is what's the best part of your day. Thorn is what was the worst part of your day. And, Rosebud is what are you looking forward to? And even just, going through that with somebody. I'm saying, what is actually when we put real meat on the bone of what you do, is that something that I want to do day to day? I get this a lot with people that they say, oh, I don't think I want to stay at Latham. I want to go, I love the cubs, and I want to work for the cubs as an in house employment counsel. I think they're thinking more sitting in the bleachers drinking an old style about why they want to go work for the cubs. Not necessarily what it was like to be a lawyer there, and it could be great, but they need to go talk to somebody that actually does it. So that the kind of the 30,000 from view of the role, also is connected to the, you know, the ground level kind of view of the role. And so, you know, that process, from introspection to outer section, is kind of the advice that I would have. And then some of the hallmarks, though, is if you're naturally curious about people, if you like, you know, frankly, if you like working at a large law firm and all that comes with that, both the good, you know, the good and maybe the more challenging, but being deeply rooted in an interest in the success of other people, I think is really the thing that allows this for me to be the marathon career, not the sprint. So really, that hallmark of, I really care about who people are and trying to help them get to where they want to go.

### What's next for you professionally? What are your aspirations

Michael Sachs: So we'll wrap things up here, but, Kevin, what's next for you? what's the aspirations you're trying to achieve? I don't mean like another job. I just mean, yeah, how are you trying to get better? How are you, what are you looking to achieve? And they got a, you got a big outdoors trip, you're coming up as well, and you have a real passion for that. I don't mean the next summit, but I mean professionally.

Michael Sachs: Yeah, well, I mean, so I turned 46 in a month, and I'm that kind of middle aged, you know, where am I at in my life? I have three young children. I have a ten year old, a nine year old, and a five year old. I feel like they take up a, great deal of my, you know, my thoughts and my hopes for them and trying to, raise them with, my wife. with respect to professional. I think one of the great things about moving outside or having a career, as you mentioned, even when I hear it's kind of zigged and zagged, is I'm out of kind of the linear career model. I don't totally know professionally what is the end goal that I have. what I know is the way I'm trying to live my professional life is do the things that remain interesting to me. Are they still available to me, a thing that, as I build a team and I try to be a good supervisor, am I putting the people that I work with in positions that they can fulfill their professional goals and support them? are we, as the programs I run, are we staying true to the mission that we have, which is to support the individual experiences of our attorneys and our alums. and are we creating programs that service those goals? And so really, what I'm trying to fix on is less delay present happiness for some vision of future happiness and just say, how can I find joy and meaning in kind of my day to day work? How can I support the teammates that I have? And then I just kind of think it all ends up taking care of itself. I'm past the stage where I think, gosh, there's some mountaintop, because you referenced that. I love mountain climbing, some professional mountaintop that's going to represent, hey, if I just get there, everything's going to be great. That's really not how the human experience is, whether in life or in your professional life. And what I think is, it's much more about. I mean, it sounds almost trite, but, you know, the pathway to, being present on the path as you just walk is really what I'm trying to. What I'm trying to do. and if I do that, I feel like wherever it ends up is at least going to be something, that's true to kind of myself and would be a kind of a fun journey along the way.

Michael Sachs: This would be great.

Michael Sachs: I feel like I just wrote a college essay, on that last answer, so I don't know, that may have gotten a little bit too metaphorical.

Michael Sachs: Yeah, I know. It's perfect. I think it was perfect. I mean, look, at a certain point, know what I mean? We all have those things, right? It's like, I want to get better. I want to improve. there are probably specific things related to one's job that one wants to do, but those are pretty. Other people might not quite grasp how important that is to somebody at the end of the day. So, yeah, I mean, use your amount up. I think you hit it perfectly.

Michael Sachs: Yeah.

### One of the frameworks, Mike, that I talked to, is the hedonic treadmill

One of the frameworks, Mike, that I talked to, because I think law is particularly, there's incentive structures to think about this. And I might be getting the exact metaphor wrong, but it's something called the hedonic treadmill, which is, the idea is represented by this. Like, if I'm in high school, you know, if I just get into that great college, then I'm gonna be happy. You get into that great college, you're the toast of the town for two weeks, but then you're a freshman at college, and two weeks in, you go, gosh,

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if I just get into that great law school, then I'm gonna be happy. And then you get into that great law school. You're the toast of the town. And then you go, oh, my gosh, if I just make law review, then I'm gonna have it made, you know, and it just goes on forever. And what I always try to say is, what does it look like to step off that treadmill? To say, what does it look like to try to be. Have a level of contentment and presence and, connection to kind of what I'm doing now, knowing that the hedonic treadmill, just that you could chase that forever, and then you're literally at the final part of your professional life going, but do I have to be president now? Like, like, there is no end game when you're on that hedonic treadmill. So, I guess as a 40, you know, soon to be 46 year old, and my treadmill speed is now a lot lower than it used to be. I'm just trying to get off the treadmill and just try, you know, try to land on my.

Michael Sachs: Well, that becomes a problem, too, because then if you're like me, you're thinking, okay, what about my retirement? Well, then if I'm retired, it'll be so great. But then other things come into play, and it's not as great as you might think it is. So, exactly.

Michael Sachs: You know, just so that. That thing of, what does it look like to be off that kind of. That mindset where, gosh, if I just get there, then I'm going to be happy. Seinfeld always has a. It's like a great thing. I'm going to get it a little bit wrong. But we, as human beings, we are always thinking about what's next. Like, you know, we got to go out to dinner. We got to hurry to get to dinner. Then when you're out, dinner goes, gosh, we got to get home. We got to get back to bed. And I think as a professional life, I'm always trying to say not what's next, or it's just like, hey, where am I at? And how do I do this in a way? And who are the people? I mean, for me, and this is how I'm motivated, is, you know, who are the people that are around me, and how am I feeling connected to them both, whether they're my clients or my teammates, and, you know, how are we kind of all be supportive to one another, and then I'm kind of happy.

Michael Sachs: Kevin, thank you for joining me today. This is perfect. I appreciate it. Always great to speak with you. Great insights. Thanks, so much, Mike.

Michael Sachs: It's always so fun to see you and, love any chance I get to talk to you and explore kind of this work that we do together.

Michael Sachs: So that will do it for this episode. We would love to get your feedback on these podcasts. Feel free to email me@msaxlaglobal.com. tell me what you liked, what you didn't like, and any suggestions for future topics of episodes. In the meantime, our current plan is to roll out one of these podcast episodes about once a month, so be on the lookout for new episodes all year as they become available. So long everyone.

Michael Sachs: Thank you for listening to in house legal Uncovered. Join us next time as we dig into another topic that will better help you navigate your in house legal career.

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