



Insight

Leading the Legal Function

STEPHEN E. NOWLAN TALKS WITH CATHERINE A. LAMBOLEY

Houston-based Shell Oil Company is a subsidiary of the Royal Dutch/Shell Group, the third-largest oil and gas group in the world, with 90,000 employees and operations in 135 countries. Catherine A. Lamboley was named senior vice president, general counsel, and corporate secretary of Shell Oil in 2000. She manages the company's U.S. legal affairs through a department of 130 lawyers.



DONNA TEREK

“Lawyers value the opportunity to talk about how company values apply to legal issues, which is one of the reasons why we created an internal CLE program on the lawyer’s role in managing risk.”

—CATHERINE A. LAMBOLEY

Stephen E. Nowlan: What’s your vision of the leadership role of the CLO?

Catherine A. Lamboley: When I was appointed general counsel, I decided to create a legal organization culture based on three qualities: community, excellence, and leadership. Community is about everyone in the organization supporting one another to achieve our goals. Excellence is about quality of work results as well as excellence in terms of behaviors, such as mutual respect, inclusiveness, and valuing others. Leadership is about recognizing that everyone who chooses to be can be a leader in terms of stepping up to identify and solve problems. These are the three core elements that I hope define what I am as a leader.

Nowlan: How do you bring these into the department’s culture?

Lamboley: Our leadership team

meets weekly to discuss what we are doing and how our values are being applied. Our goal is to conduct our work in a way that reflects our values. We have major initiatives under way on knowledge sharing as well as diversity, both within the department and with our law firms. We assign mentors to new lawyers joining the department to show them the ropes. We look for opportunities for people to take on leadership roles on teams and projects where they can get experience in managing. We also actively participate in community service projects. The leadership team is very focused on building our culture.

Nowlan: How do you help the department deal with stress and a heavy workload?

Lamboley: This is when the element of community becomes very important. It is very important for me to be visible in the department, encouraging everyone to support one another and step out of one’s normal role to share

the load. It’s also important to ensure there is some levity and fun so that people can relax a bit and not be so consumed by the pressure cooker. For example, I have informal skip-level lunches every month with 10 people. Each lunch includes lawyers, paralegals, and support staff. We have an open agenda and talk about what they are interested in. With about 250 people in the organization, these lunches enable me to have a meal with about half of the department each year.

Nowlan: What lessons have you learned about leadership?

Lamboley: Being a good leader starts with living values that people want to share and bring into their own activities. It also requires taking the time to share information, provide training, and continuously communicate with people about what’s going on, what they are doing, and what they are worried about. I think you can never communicate often enough. •