



The Gravitas Checklist

7 Subtle Signs Your
GC Candidate Will Earn
the CEO's Trust

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Why Small Cues Speak Loudest

Credentials can be verified. Executive presence must be observed.

Even seasoned interviewers can overlook the subtle signals that separate a capable candidate from a trusted strategic partner. Gravitas does not arrive with a title. It emerges through tone, timing, and quiet authority under pressure.

BarkerGilmore developed this checklist to help CHROs and talent leaders recognize the signs of a credible, resilient General Counsel. These same qualities are cultivated through BarkerGilmore's decades of legal leadership coaching and candidate evaluation.

Each point below offers a lens through which to assess presence, not performance. When the enterprise faces complexity, leadership must rely on more than technical strength. Presence becomes the stabilizing force.



1. Communicates with precision, clarity, and restraint

A trusted legal advisor avoids excess. Confident counsel uses language intentionally, delivers insight with clarity, and recognizes when a pause carries more weight than added explanation. Observe how responses unfold. Strong candidates cut through complexity. Rambling signals hesitation, not depth.

Where to look: Interviews involving business-critical decisions. Clear articulation in high-pressure scenarios signals readiness for executive dialogue.

2. Aligns legal insight with business strategy

The most effective General Counsel speak in enterprise terms, not just legal frameworks. Look for natural integration of commercial priorities in legal examples. Phrases grounded in collaboration, stakeholder alignment, and long-term value indicate fluency in the business of the business.

Where to look: Descriptions of cross-functional partnerships, risk framing, and decision-making support. Strong alignment earns immediate credibility with CEOs.

3. Conveys composure under scrutiny

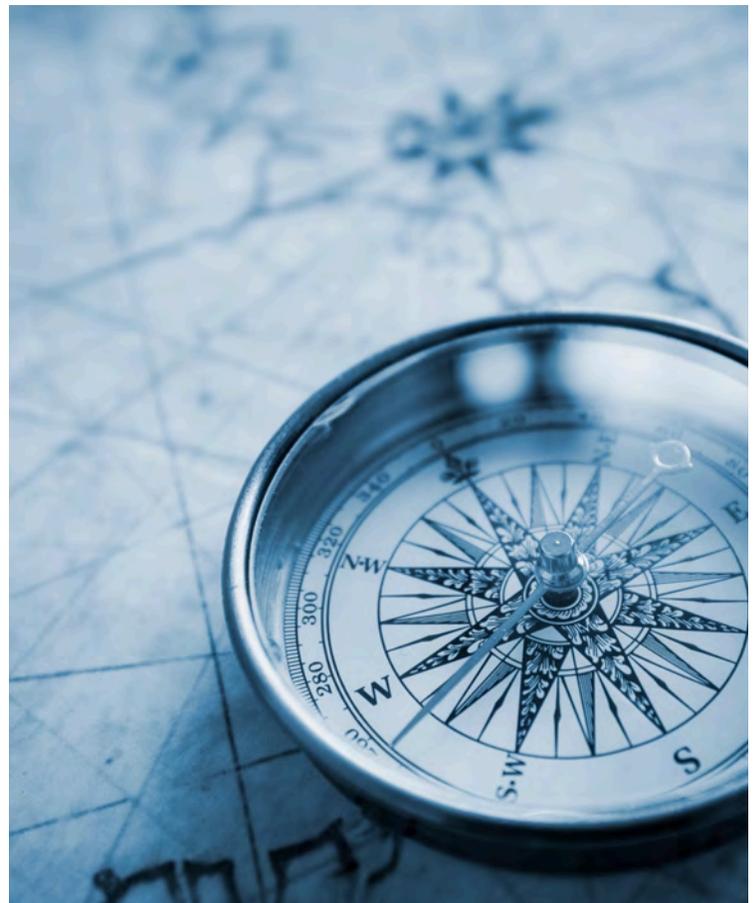
Gravitas appears when circumstances demand calm. A credible candidate brings steadiness into the room. Posture, tone, and word choice should reflect control, not just during crises described, but in how those moments are communicated.

Where to look: Narratives involving regulatory pressure, litigation, or organizational change. The ability to calm others begins with internal steadiness.

4. Anchors decisions in values and principles

An executive's true compass becomes visible under pressure. Exceptional General Counsel articulate how core values shape difficult decisions. Look for clarity around how conflicting priorities were balanced and how trust was maintained across stakeholders.

Where to look: Situations involving ethical ambiguity or unpopular decisions. Consistency builds over time, but it becomes evident through thoughtful reflection.





5. Tailors communication style across audiences

Effective counsel adapts language and presence based on who is in the room. The same legal guidance may take different form with the board, C-suite, or front-line teams. Versatility without dilution of message indicates high emotional intelligence and strategic awareness.

Where to look: Examples of stakeholder alignment, enterprise communications, or organizational change efforts. Subtle shifts in tone and message matter.

6. Inspires followership across roles and levels

Gravitas invites trust beyond the reporting line. High-performing legal leaders retain teams, attract repeat collaborators, and inspire loyalty through presence. Listen for evidence of people choosing to stay, return, or follow across transitions.

Where to look: Team development stories, succession planning, and references from former colleagues. Loyalty follows authentic leadership.

7. Invests intentionally in executive presence

Mature leaders do not assume gravitas; they build it. The strongest General Counsel invest in coaching, seek peer feedback, and cultivate presence as a leadership asset. Listen for intentional development, not accidental polish.

Where to look: Coaching engagements, transitions into broader roles, or reflections on feedback received. Growth signals commitment to lead with steadiness, not simply occupy the seat.

Applying the Checklist

This checklist works best alongside thoughtful questions and disciplined listening. Gravitas rarely announces itself. It is revealed in every decision, pause, pivot, and moment of clarity.

BarkerGilmore integrates this assessment philosophy into every retained search and leadership coaching engagement. Each candidate is evaluated not only for experience, but for the quiet strength that earns long-term trust from the CEO and board.

When presence matters as much as performance, rely on the firm trusted to identify both.

Ready to assess the intangibles that define executive impact?

Let's start the conversation.

About BarkerGilmore

Founded in 2006, BarkerGilmore is recognized as the industry's leading executive search, coaching, and advisory firm dedicated exclusively to the recruitment, retention, and success of in-house legal and compliance teams.

With a team of highly experienced search consultants and a distinguished bench of former General Counsel and Chief Compliance Officers, BarkerGilmore delivers unparalleled expertise and insight. The firm serves as a strategic advisor to its clients, delivering comprehensive solutions that maximize the business value of corporate legal and compliance departments.

