

A BarkerGilmore 20th Anniversary Executive Profile



Kari Brashear



Chief Legal Officer, Corporate Secretary, and SVP Corporate Development
Myers Industries

“Learn the business inside and out, backwards and forwards.”

Reaching the Chief Legal Officer seat is often viewed as the culmination of a legal career. For Kari Brashear, reaching the role prompted a different response. Rather than viewing it as a finish line, she saw it as the next stage in her evolution from legal leader and business operator to enterprise executive, and she decided to become more deliberate about her own development.

Kari had considerable experience to draw upon. Her career at Valmont Industries progressed through increasingly senior legal positions before moving in an unconventional direction. She stepped outside legal to lead an operating business, ultimately assuming responsibility for a roughly \$600 million P&L. That operating role required fluency not only in commercial execution but also in the financial drivers of the business: performance, investment choices, and the tradeoffs behind capital allocation. It gave Kari a level of financial sophistication that would later distinguish her as a legal and enterprise leader.

Running a business changed Kari’s perspective on leadership. Legal expertise had taught her how to assess risk, exercise judgment, and advise senior leaders. Operating responsibility required her to create alignment, motivate teams, understand commercial pressures, and remain accountable for results. The experience also gave Kari a clearer view of what business leaders need from legal. The most valuable legal executives understand the business deeply enough to help shape strategy and advance its objectives.

When Kari became a first-time Chief Legal Officer at Scoular, she entered the role with both perspectives. She also recognized that neither experience eliminated the learning curve ahead. “I wanted to be very thoughtful about how I showed up as an enterprise executive,” Kari recalls. The role also deepened her appreciation for one of the CLO’s most important sources of access and influence: a trusted relationship with the CEO.

That intention led to one of the decisions Kari now considers particularly important in her development as a CLO: making executive coaching with Michelle Banks, former EVP, Global GC, CCO & Corporate Secretary of Gap, Inc., and BarkerGilmore Strategic Advisor & Executive Coach, a priority.

Preparing for a Different Kind of Leadership

Kari had spent years preparing for the opportunity to become a Chief Legal Officer. Once the opportunity arrived, she resisted the assumption that success in previous senior roles guaranteed readiness for every dimension of the CLO position. The distinction mattered.

As a senior legal executive, Kari had advised leaders on consequential decisions. As CLO and a member of the executive leadership team, she had responsibilities that extended beyond advice. She now shared accountability for the enterprise's performance and direction.

Kari describes the shift as “the difference between advising and owning.” Her operating experience provided useful preparation, but the CLO seat introduced a distinct set of leadership demands. Relationships with the CEO and board took on new importance. Executive influence extended well beyond legal matters. Building the right team became inseparable from Kari’s own effectiveness.

Kari chose to make coaching part of the transition. Michelle brought a combination Kari considered especially valuable: executive coaching expertise and firsthand experience as a successful General Counsel who understood the CLO role from inside the seat.

“She was a highly successful CLO and could look around the corners for me before I even knew what I was looking for,” Kari says. Michelle’s experience helped Kari think through the subtle changes required when an accomplished functional leader becomes an enterprise executive.

When Strengths Need to Evolve

One of Kari’s most consequential realizations as a first-time CLO was that some of the strengths that had fueled her success could become constraints at the enterprise level. Expertise, responsiveness, personal ownership, and a willingness to work through difficult problems had served her well throughout her career. In the CLO seat, however, those same instincts could create overextension if she remained too close to work others were capable of leading.

Kari began distinguishing more deliberately between responsibilities that required the CLO’s direct ownership and those better entrusted to capable members of her team. The distinction sounds straightforward. In practice, delegation can be most difficult in areas where a leader has developed considerable expertise. Familiar work creates confidence, and expertise becomes part of professional identity. Letting go can therefore require more discipline than taking on something new.

A central question became whether Kari had the resources and organizational structure required to meet the role’s expectations. Looking back, she credits Michelle with pushing her to confront that question early. “Michelle drove me to think more deliberately about the team, structure, and delegation I would need to operate effectively at the enterprise level and about where my own direct involvement created the greatest value,” Kari says. The experience reshaped how Kari thought about the legal organization itself.

Building an Organization Around Leadership

No Chief Legal Officer can remain the deepest expert across every discipline while simultaneously serving as an enterprise leader. Kari became increasingly deliberate about where her personal involvement created the greatest value, where additional expertise was needed, and where she needed sufficient confidence in her team to step away from work she knew she could do well. That process ultimately led to changes in Kari's organizational structure.

The objective was not delegation for its own sake. Kari wanted an organization capable of operating effectively without requiring the CLO to remain at the center of every important matter. Such a structure also allowed her to devote greater attention to responsibilities only she could fulfill: advising the CEO and board, contributing to enterprise strategy, developing senior talent, and connecting decisions across the organization. The shift required Kari to make those choices deliberately rather than allowing urgency to make them for her.

Defining Her Own Version of the CLO Role

As Kari settled into the position, another question became increasingly important: who did she want to be as Chief Legal Officer?

Kari had inherited a strong legal department from an accomplished predecessor. The foundation was excellent, but Kari's own background was different. Years in legal leadership had been complemented by commercial and operating experience, including direct P&L accountability. Rather than simply carrying forward an existing model, Kari saw an opportunity to define an approach to the CLO role that reflected her particular combination of experiences and strengths.

That process went beyond leadership style. Kari considered where she could contribute distinct value, how she wanted to influence enterprise decisions, and which capabilities her organization needed around her. The lesson has become increasingly important as her career has progressed: there is no single model for an effective Chief Legal Officer. Successful executives understand the requirements of the seat while remaining clear about the experiences and strengths they personally bring to it.

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From Functional Excellence to Enterprise Perspective

Kari now serves as Chief Legal Officer, Corporate Secretary, and SVP Corporate Development at Myers Industries. The move was significant in two ways: it brought her into a public-company environment, and it reunited her with a CEO she knew from Valmont and with whom she was strongly aligned. For Kari, a trusted CEO relationship is an important foundation for contributing early and meaningfully to enterprise decisions. Her responsibilities encompass legal, compliance, governance, and corporate development, bringing together much of the experience she has accumulated throughout her career.

Instead of approaching every issue primarily through a legal lens, Kari considers how decisions connect to strategy, operations, capital allocation, stakeholder priorities, and long-term business performance. Her operating background and direct P&L accountability give her unusual fluency in the financial implications of those choices, while her corporate development responsibilities place that perspective directly in the work of evaluating growth and investment opportunities. Her role increasingly involves connecting perspectives rather than owning every individual piece. That breadth of responsibility places her at the intersection of risk, transactions, capital allocation, and growth.

During a period of transformation at Myers, such a perspective has become particularly valuable. Complex business issues rarely respect functional boundaries. Legal, commercial, operational, governance, and strategic considerations frequently converge. Kari's career has prepared her to work at those intersections.

Learn the Business Inside and Out

For lawyers aspiring to become Chief Legal Officers, Kari begins with a principle that has remained constant throughout her career. "Learn the business inside and out, backwards and forwards," Kari advises.

Kari believes legal leaders need to understand how the company makes money, what drives performance, which external forces influence results, and what concerns occupy business leaders. The CLO must also maintain perspective beyond the company. Markets, geopolitical developments, industry dynamics, peer companies, and emerging risks can influence decisions well before a matter reaches the legal department. Such curiosity supports a larger transition. A Chief Legal Officer may lead the legal function, but the executive's responsibility is to the enterprise.

Growth After the Goal

Kari's experience offers a useful perspective on executive development. The capabilities that propel someone toward the CLO seat do not automatically constitute the complete skill set required upon arrival. Some strengths need to be deepened. Others need to evolve. A few may need to be exercised with greater restraint. For Kari, continued development required the discipline to examine those distinctions deliberately.

Over time, Kari became more intentional about deciding what required her ownership, building sufficient strength around herself to let go of the rest, and defining an approach grounded in her own operating, financial, and legal experience. That discipline continues to shape her leadership as her responsibilities expand.

Closing Perspective

For more than twenty years, BarkerGilmore has advised and coached legal and compliance executives through pivotal moments in leadership. Executive coaching connects senior leaders with accomplished former General Counsel and Chief Compliance Officers who understand the complexity of leading at the enterprise level. Kari's experience with executive coaching reflects the purpose of such a partnership. The most valuable conversations help leaders examine assumptions, recognize blind spots, make more deliberate choices, and develop a leadership approach suited to both the executive and the organization.

For leaders who have already reached the highest levels of their profession, continued growth may require something more difficult than acquiring another skill. Sometimes, progress begins with reconsidering how success itself should look.

A Partner in Leadership

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