



From the Desk of the GC to the Boardroom

California Minority Counsel Program — Annual Business Conference

Date & Time: Friday, September 25, 2026; 9:00 am - 10:30 am

Title: Opening Plenary | From the Desk of the GC to the Boardroom: What In-House Leaders—and their Outside Counsel—Need to know

Description:

From the Desk of the GC to the Boardroom will bring together legal leaders to discuss the evolving role attorneys play both as strategic advisors and as influential voices in organizational governance. The program will begin with a discussion of emerging issues shaping today's legal and business landscape, including trends and challenges that general counsel, law firm attorneys, and legal departments are navigating across industries. Panelists will share practical insights on risk management, regulatory developments, litigation trends, privacy and compliance concerns, stakeholder expectations, and the increasing demand for attorneys to serve as business partners in addition to legal advisors.

The conversation will then turn to the boardroom, exploring how attorneys can expand their impact through service on public, private, and nonprofit boards. Panelists will discuss the value lawyers bring to governance, oversight, strategy, and crisis management, as well as the pathways attorneys—including those in private practice—can take to position themselves for board opportunities. The discussion will also address ethical considerations, conflicts issues, leadership development, and the ways board service can strengthen an attorney's professional profile and strategic perspective.

Learning Objective:

- Insight into current legal and business issues affecting organizations and the legal profession;
- A deeper understanding of the strategic role attorneys play beyond traditional legal functions;

- Practical guidance on preparing for and pursuing board service opportunities;
- Strategies for leveraging legal experience to contribute meaningfully to governance and organizational leadership; and
- Actionable perspectives on leadership, professional growth, and long-term career development within and beyond the practice of law

Moderator:

- Marie Ma (Articulate)

Speakers:

- Wilma Wallace (Premera Blue Cross, FSG and Landesa)
- Jonathan Kuai (Korn Ferry)
- Tricia Montalvo Timm (Salsify)

CA MCLE: 1.25 HR in CA MCLE Credit [General credit]

SUBTOPIC 1 – THE GC AS A STRATEGIC BUSINESS LEADER

- The role of General Counsel has changed dramatically. You're no longer just the company's lawyer — you're at the table for every major business decision. How has your definition of the GC role evolved over the course of your career?
- What does it actually mean to be a strategic business partner — not just a legal advisor — and how did you develop that skill set?
- We're navigating an increasingly complex environment: AI, regulatory pressure, geopolitical uncertainty, reputational risk. How do you help your organization move forward confidently when the landscape keeps shifting?
- How does deep industry expertise change the value you bring as a legal leader — and how should early-career attorneys think about building that kind of domain knowledge?

SUBTOPIC 2 – EXPANDING THE ATTORNEY'S SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

We've talked about how the GC role has evolved into something much broader than legal risk management. You're strategists. You're operators. You're business enablers sitting at the intersection of law, business, governance, and leadership. For many attorneys, there comes a point where they ask: how do I take everything I've built and use it to create impact in a different way? One path that doesn't get enough attention

— especially early enough — is board service. It's not the right fit for everyone. And it's not easy to access.

[WIP: Before we dig into how to get there, let me share some context on where things stand. Despite meaningful progress after 2020, the data tells a sobering story. New non-White director appointments peaked at 48% of incoming board classes in 2022 — and dropped to 31% by 2024. Women of color hold just 7.4% of Russell 3000 seats, down from 7.7%. LGBTQ+ directors hold less than 1% of Fortune 500 seats. And in a troubling sign, the share of companies even disclosing board diversity data dropped from 85% to 45% between 2024 and 2025. The doors that opened are closing — and for this audience, that makes understanding how to get in more important than ever.]

SUBTOPIC 3 – WHAT IS BOARD SERVICE?

- Let's start with the basics. What is a board, and what does it actually mean to serve on one? What are the main types of boards — public, private, nonprofit — and how do they differ?
- What does a board member actually do day-to-day — or month-to-month — or quarter-to-quarter? How is that role fundamentally different from the role of General Counsel?
- What are the fiduciary responsibilities a director takes on, and what does that mean in practice for an attorney stepping into that role for the first time?

SUBTOPIC 4 – THE PATH IN – FROM BOTH SIDES OF THE TABLE

- There's a persistent myth that board service is only for active / retired CEOs or CFOs - executives at the end of their careers. And lawyers are generally not at the top of the list for consideration. Jonathan, from your vantage point – can you tell us about your view on attorneys as prospective board candidates? Are you seeing that perception shift? Are organizations genuinely opening up to attorneys as board candidates?
- You've both done it — you've landed seats on for-profit boards. Can you take us back to your first board role? How did the opportunity come about, and what made you say yes?
- What do you think actually got you considered — what broke through that perception and put you on someone's radar?

- Board selection is often opaque — it happens through relationships and networks that aren't always visible. How do you build the kind of visibility and credibility that gets you into those conversations?
- For attorneys in private practice — outside counsel — you're often deeply embedded in your clients' businesses. How can that relationship be a legitimate pathway to board consideration, and where are the ethical lines?
- What should attorneys be doing right now — at whatever stage of their career — to position themselves for board opportunities in the future? What's the work that needs to happen before you're ready to be considered?

SUBTOPIC 5 – THE VALUE PROPOSITION: WHY SHOULD I CONSIDER IT?

- Let's talk about what board service actually does for you as a professional. How has serving on a board changed the way you think, the way you lead, or the way you advise?
- The thesis of today's conversation is that attorneys bring something distinctive to boardrooms — not just legal knowledge, but a particular way of thinking about risk, governance, and accountability. What is that value proposition, in your view?
- Boards today are grappling with things that attorneys are uniquely positioned on: AI governance, regulatory exposure, political pressure, ESG, crisis response. Where do you see the greatest opportunity for legal leaders to shape the conversation at the board level?
- Why should an attorney who has never thought about board service start thinking about it now — especially someone who might assume it's not available to them or not relevant to where they are in their career?

SUBTOPIC 6 – CLOSING REFLECTIONS

- One piece of advice for an attorney who is starting to think seriously about board service as part of their next chapter?
- What makes you most hopeful about the role attorneys can play in shaping organizations and society?

CITATIONS AND RESOURCES

Organizations, Professional Collectives, and Networks:

- [How Women Lead](#) an organization dedicated to getting more women on boards. They also have an annual #GetOnBoard Week - this is a weeklong program to help women prepare for their first board seat.
- [Firstboard.io](#) is a curated professional collective and network that connects growing companies with accomplished women technology leaders qualified to serve on corporate boards of directors.
- [LCDA](#) (Latino Corporate Directors Association) helps get more Latinos on boards.
- [Black Women on Boards](#) (BWOB) - this organization helps Black female leaders secure and succeed in public, private, and advisory corporate board seats.
- [The Fourth Effect](#) - connects corporate executives, investors and board directors with early-stage founders for advisory board roles, which can lead to a board seat.

Literary Resources:

- [Embrace The Power of You by Tricia Montalvo Timm](#). This book discusses the journey of a first-generation Latina and the struggle of being the first. It helps the reader on the journey to self-acceptance and understanding that showing up authentically is the path to success.

Programs:

- [How Women Lead: #GetOnBoardWeek](#) this is annual online and in person board summit.
- [LCDEF BoardReady Institute](#) this is a comprehensive, in person program uniquely designed to prepare and position aspiring directors for boardroom success.