

KNOCKING *for* OPPORTUNITY



Delida Costin builds Pandora's legal dream team with reverse mentors

BY MALENA AMUSA

Delida Costin is the tech law powerhouse supporting the legal needs of Pandora Media Inc., the leading personalized radio service providing more than 175 million people customized music and comedy stations.

She attributes much of her success to cultivating a team of smart, well-rounded attorneys to meet the legal needs of the company. To achieve this, Costin makes it a practice to seek out employees who can contribute specialized expertise or experience in a certain field of law.

"I have many reverse mentors," said Costin, who arrived at Pandora in 2010 as the company's first General Counsel. "Reverse mentors are people who are junior to me but have an expertise in an area that I do not."

Valued at \$2.6 billion at its opening on Wall Street in 2011, Pandora allows listeners to create personalized music stations online by simply searching a particular artist, song or genre. Recently, Pandora expanded its U.S.-based service internationally for the first time, to Australia and New Zealand.

PANDORA[®]
internet radio

TEAM BUILDING

In the beginning of Costin's career at Pandora, she was tasked with supporting the vast sales team that sold advertisements for the service. She rapidly assembled a legal dream team to tackle issues ranging from advertiser contracts to artist royalties to privacy concerns and more.

"When I first got here, it was very similar to flying an airplane while I was building it," said Costin, who has a team of 12 working with her. She also has seen the company grow from 100-odd employees to more than 650 in two years.

"I'm more aware and focused on my team than I ever have been in the past," said the 42-year-old New York native and graduate of Boston University Law School.

"One of the things about lawyers who come up in big law firms is that we are trained to move through the ranks in lockstep, so there's not enough focus on team management, training and coaching. But the lockstep doesn't work in an in-house legal environment. It's really about coaching people, enabling them to



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POWER TO THE *Young Professionals*

Delida Costin's top three pointers for rising stars:

1. You're not the person people say you are: You are who you want to be.
2. Learn from all criticism, both good and bad.
3. Seek out great leaders and learn from them.



learn, supervising them adequately and giving them great responsibility and opportunities.”

As a result, Costin goes out of her way to help her legal team do their best work. For example, when her department expressed a desire to gain more visibility into the company's business decisions, Costin without hesitation worked with them to find a way to better streamline communication. “In this way, the team coached me,” Costin said. “I take cues from them often. I respect each of them for their expertise and ideas on how to make the team a more efficient unit.”

“We're not big on performance reviews at Pandora,” she said, “Instead our managers try to help people unlock their employees' full potential.”

FINDING OPPORTUNITY

A talkative and sci-fi-fiction-loving lawyer, Costin did not exactly set out to become general counsel of a leading online music streamer. Rather, she focused on finding the “cool, fun or funky” jobs that made her happy, and her career path developed from there.

“One of the guiding truths about my life has been that I look for opportunities,” Costin said. “And I look for opportunities that come around organically, that I might not be looking for specifically. I was never somebody who said I want to be general counsel for Pandora, but now that I'm here, I am enjoying the excitement of being with a company that creates a product so many people are passionate about.”

Before joining Pandora, Costin studied History and International Studies at Northwestern University, worked for prisoner rights, taught English to Hmong kids, went to law school, won political asylum for a Haitian immigrant in her spare time and became a securities lawyer. Relocating to northern California to study tech law and spend more time snowboarding at Lake Tahoe, she excelled at securities work for Pillsbury Madison & Sutro and even practiced law solo, advising startup companies and blogging about her experiences.

Then one day, she went to interview Joe Kennedy, CEO and President of Pandora, for her blog; that meeting ended up turning into a job offer.

“The way to be successful,” Costin said, “is to keep looking for things that make you happy and go for it, listen to your gut.”

Malena Amusa is a freelance writer based in Saint Louis, Missouri.