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New Kirkland Program Gets Lawyers Thinking About Career Goals, Going In-House

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Rachel Gervin has worked at three Big Law firms during her legal career. But only one, Kirkland & Ellis, has kept in touch with her, she said. And it is that ongoing connection that recently helped Gervin, now the executive director and general counsel at Impact Church in Atlanta, reshape her career path.

Gervin was among 30 participants, mainly Kirkland senior associates, junior partners and alumni involved in a pilot program designed to help Kirkland attorneys gain insight into their clients' needs and perspectives and to prepare lawyers for a potential future career in-house. It also sought to help participants build a network of peers and potential future business contacts, including Kirkland colleagues past and present, and to support women



courtesy photo

Kirkland & Ellis alumnae Rachel Gervin, left, and Karen Prena participated in the firm's In-House Insider Experience.

alumni looking to return to the workforce.

Panels led by former Kirkland attorneys now working in-house or senior partners who returned to the firm after an in-house stint discussed everything from what a typical day in-house looks like to what general counsel look for in

outside firms. But they also dug deeper to a personal level and talked about why they made the transition and what it looked like for them.

Although dubbed the "In-House Insider Experience," participants and organizers described the program as simply

a chance for attorneys—at a critical time in their careers—to take a hard look at exactly what they want to do going forward.

“Starting to contemplate big career moves might be a bit of an unknown for folks whose lives have perhaps been on autopilot,” said Gregg Garmisa, who opened the first session on the first day with a presentation on his journey from Kirkland senior associate to becoming principal and general counsel at Studio Gang, an architecture and urban design practice. “I wanted to use the experience from my own transition to let them know that this transition can be quite profound.”

And this wasn’t your typical law firm training event. The “In-House Insider Experience” was held over three full Saturdays from December to March in unique Chicago locations, including a technology incubator and indoor rock-climbing space, each “strategically and purposefully chosen to break down barriers and get participants into a different mode,” said Chiara Wrocinski, Kirkland’s senior director of firmwide legal

recruiting and development.

The activities were unique as well, said Gervin, who decided to participate after receiving information about the program the day after she learned that her former position as general counsel at Atlanta-based The Sage Group was being eliminated. For example, a Venn diagram drawn dur-

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ing one of the program activities demonstrating an intersection between passions and strengths changed her perspective on what a career could entail, she said.

But it was one “phenomenal exercise” that Gervin found particularly enlightening. Participants shared with small-group mem-

bers the results of self-assessments and strength-identifying surveys, along with personal reflections, after which the listeners identified on a piece of paper potential career possibilities for the speaker. What was written on several of the notes Gervin received? Executive director of a nonprofit organization—a position Gervin now holds.

“I don’t know if I would have been open to this offer if I hadn’t had the opportunity to pause and focus on what is important to me,” she said. “This is really what our profession should be doing.”

Given the great success and interest in the program—there were about 50 applications for this year’s 30 spots—Wrocinski said Kirkland hopes to offer the event on an annual basis.

“This is something that goes beyond making [participants] qualified attorneys,” she said. “It’s about making them happy, and there’s a lot of power to happy people.”

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