

A Diverse Global Company

An Interview with Catherine Smith,
Executive Vice President, General Counsel and Chief Administrative Officer, Brightstar Corp.



Catherine Smith

EDITORS' NOTE Catherine Smith is also a member of the board of directors. Prior to Brightstar, from May 2008 to July 2011, Smith served as Vice President and Lead Counsel for Motorola, Inc. and Motorola Mobility. She also held a variety of other executive positions and served as the President and Executive Sponsor for the Global Inclusion and Diversity Council in 2007. Smith holds a bachelor's degree in Political Science and Economics from the University of Virginia and a Juris Doctor degree from Georgetown University Law School.

COMPANY BRIEF Brightstar Corp. (brightstar.com) is a subsidiary of SoftBank Group Corp. and the world's leading mobile services company for managing devices and accessories across the wireless ecosystem. With a comprehensive portfolio of B2B offerings and unrivaled wireless expertise, it simplifies the wireless world, making mobile technology accessible to everyone. Brightstar serves mobile network operators, retailers, manufacturers and enterprise customers across 100 countries. It touches almost every aspect of a mobile device somewhere in its life cycle by providing innovative end-to-end services seamlessly integrated across customer mobile value chains. Brightstar reported global net revenues of approximately \$12.1 billion in 2015.

Will you talk about your areas of focus in this role?

There are three primary areas of focus. First, as Chief Administrative Officer, I have overall responsibility for our HR organization, with a particular focus on the employee experience and culture of our organization. I'm mindful of the importance of having an environment that supports growth and development of the individual while being a dynamic and rewarding place to work. As we shape the culture for our future success at Brightstar, I along with my HR organization, must have a pulse on what fuels our employees from the millennials to those with more experience.

On the General Counsel side, it is about employing a legal rubric around the company that breeds consistency and reliability in how we go to market and how we service our customers. It also involves building a compliant organization – we do business in approximately 100 countries with varying rules and laws, so we have to know how we can be successful in those markets while living up to our values and our standards, and how we consistently operate across the overall enterprise.

Finally, as a board member, my primary role is governance and assisting in the overall direction setting of the company.

How critical is it to communicate about the transformation going on at Brightstar and to have your people on board?

It is essential. Timely and consistent communication is critical to the success of any change initiative. One of the key work streams we have as part of our transformation roadmap is focused on people and organization. A key element of this is tied to the communication work stream, where we work in partnership with the marketing and communications leadership.

We have created big messaging about what we are doing and how we are doing it, as well as regional and local messaging that is cascaded by each leader throughout the organization. We engage all employees in these efforts with global interactive sessions and ongoing internal social-media tools. To be successful, we have to ensure our communication resonates in each of the countries we serve bearing in mind local customs. In addition, we have

encouraged our employees to come along with us on this transformation journey based on the values and purpose that we live together as one company. It is imperative that we go the extra mile and inspire our employees, so that they have clear purpose and understand “why” they get out of bed every morning and come to work. Our unifying purpose is: “We simplify the wireless world, making mobile technology accessible to everyone.”

Will you talk about how ingrained diversity is at the leadership level at Brightstar?

We're one of the unique companies in the marketplace in that we are truly a diverse global company. This starts with our CEO, who has a diverse background, and flows down through myself, our CFO, and our senior staff.

We have local offices in about 50 countries and we speak approximately 40 languages in our daily interaction with our customers and suppliers. We have to continue to make sure that diversity, at varying levels within the organization, remains a key part of our strategy. We desire to be reflective of many of the customers we serve and, to be successful at that, we have to have diversity at every level.

Is the platform there for women to lead and grow within the business and can more be done in that regard?

Yes. That said, there remains opportunity to expand in this area. There aren't enough women in telecomm. Beyond our industry, less than 5 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs and only five FTSE 100 CEOs are women. While 17 percent of the CIO's in the FTSE 100 are women, that number has not changed in almost 10 years. Another challenge for many companies is that women are now branching out on their own and establishing their own companies. They realize the power that they have, not only from an intelligence perspective but the power of decision-making and the power of the purse. We have to do better in capturing these capabilities for our company, our customers, and the industry.

What excited you about joining Brightstar in 2011 and, looking back, has it been what you expected?

What excited me was the growth trajectory and the entrepreneurial culture at Brightstar. When I arrived, the board and the leadership at that time realized that in order for Brightstar to maintain its leadership position in the industry, it needed to evolve from being solely a distribution company to expanding into becoming a full-service organization. We have successfully continued the evolution and have since become pretty much the only company in the market that provides end-to-end services, built upon technology platforms that make mobile technology accessible to everyone.

You are general counsel but also run HR and are involved in strategy as a board member as well. Do all of these areas link?

They do link, very well I believe. At the center of all my responsibilities is advocacy. Whether I am advocating for the interests of my internal clients, our employees, or our shareholders, it is what makes my role unique and rewarding.

What advice do you give young people entering business?

My advice for young people is to be a sponge when it comes to learning. One of the things that makes Brightstar a great company to work for is that we offer high-performing employees opportunities that perhaps people with their level of seniority or experience might not normally receive. We find when we do that, we breed not only loyalty but we accelerate the learning process of the employee, and it often yields exceptional innovation, which is a terrific result for our customers. ●