

People, Process, Technology, And Culture

An Interview with Pierre M. Gentin, Senior Partner and Chief Legal Officer, McKinsey & Company

EDITORS' NOTE Pierre Gentin is McKinsey's Chief Legal Officer. He leads the legal and public affairs functions and advises the firm's management team and board. Gentin is the first non-consultant elected a senior partner in McKinsey's history. In 2022, the *Financial Times* named him one of the top 20 general counsel worldwide. Gentin joined McKinsey in 2019 with nearly 30 years' experience in business, law, government, and academia. He was previously a partner in the law firm of Cabill Gordon & Reindel and a senior legal and risk officer at Credit Suisse. Gentin also served in the U.S. Department of Justice as an Assistant United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York. He has been recognized as a leading lawyer by *Bloomberg*, *The American Lawyer*, *Corporate Counsel*, *Brunswick Review*, *Law360*, *LawDragon*, *Legal500*, and others. He regularly advises general counsel and other executives on the design and management of corporate functions.



Pierre M. Gentin

FIRM BRIEF McKinsey & Company ([mckinsey.com](https://www.mckinsey.com)) is a global management consulting firm committed to helping organizations accelerate sustainable and inclusive growth. It works with clients across the private, public, and social sectors to solve complex problems and create positive change for all its stakeholders. The firm combines bold strategies and transformative

technologies to help organizations innovate more sustainably, achieve lasting gains in performance, and build workforces that will thrive for this generation and the next.

What have been the keys to McKinsey's industry leadership and how do you describe the McKinsey difference?

We work across industries worldwide to help create resilient businesses that can withstand, grow, and thrive in today's volatile macroeconomic environ-

ment, and through nearly a century of this service to our clients, we're uniquely trusted to help CEOs and other business leaders meet complex and changing demands. As a firm, we focus on three values: adhering to the highest professional standards, improving our clients' performance significantly, and creating an unrivalled environment for exceptional people. It's that mix of professionalism – but also passion for what we do – that allows us to lead in this industry.

What excited you about the opportunity to join McKinsey and made you feel it was the right fit?

One of my favorite quotes is from John Lennon who said, "Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans." As a law firm partner, I was approached about various general counsel roles but wasn't interested in pursuing them. The McKinsey role got my attention as this was the first time in the firm's history that it was hiring a GC.

Of course, I knew McKinsey by reputation, but when I met leadership, it was clear that this was a firm with a remarkably storied history and distinctive people who are advising on some of the world's most difficult problems. The more I learned about the firm, its people, and the work, the more interested I became.

Will you provide an overview of your role and areas of focus?

I'm a Senior Partner and serve as the firm's Chief Legal Officer where I lead the legal and public affairs teams. I'm a member of the firm's global leadership team and the first Senior Partner not to have served as a management consultant in the firm's 98-year history.

McKinsey's legal and public affairs function is an extraordinary group of nearly 300 colleagues in 66 locations worldwide. While each day is different, my broad focus has been transforming our professional function and fostering an ethos of solution orientation that will stand the test of time.

I want a community of aspirational professionals who combine professional excellence and passion. The professionalism is expressed through responsiveness to our internal business clients, protecting our firm, and developing relationships of trust. The passion is about what excites and inspires our people. I believe there is an appropriate and joyful way to bring into our work life things that energize us personally – music, athletics, external speakers, yoga, volunteerism, teaching at universities, mentorship. McKinsey Legal's blog on cutting-edge issues, *In The Balance*, goes out to 5 million people on [mckinsey.com](https://www.mckinsey.com) – that sort of thing.

**“As a firm, we focus on three values:
adhering to the highest professional standards,
improving our clients' performance significantly,
and creating an unrivalled environment
for exceptional people.”**

“We continue to invest in transforming the way our firm makes decisions and manages risk across the four dimensions of people, process, technology, and culture.”

How critical is it for the legal function to be engaged in business strategy?

Legal can help with business strategy in two ways. Legal considerations, such as regulatory requirements and associated costs and timing, can be integral to the effective implementation of business strategy. Strong lawyers can also offer a dispassionate and realistic assessment of opportunities that can be a helpful dose of reality sometimes. Lawyers can also provide input that identifies strategic opportunities that businesspeople don't always see.

How is McKinsey reshaping decision-making and risk management across people, process, technology, and culture?

We continue to invest in transforming the way our firm makes decisions and manages risk across the four dimensions of people, process, technology, and culture.

Since 2018, we've invested nearly \$700 million to upgrade our governance and risk management capabilities. We've built teams of world-class experts and are working to give them the influence they need. That includes adding senior executive professionals with strong, diverse backgrounds and deep external experience – for example, from top-tier law and accounting firms.

We also continue to invest in new technologies and platforms to implement policies and drive compliance more effectively. I've established a Technology Council within McKinsey Legal to integrate AI into our work and ensure alignment with our practices on legal support for our firm's technology efforts for clients.

Last, but probably most important, is culture change. The quantity and quality of internal dialogue on risk awareness has increased meaningfully in our firm. Practically, this means honest discussion within the partnership about how we can continue to drive client impact in ways that will make us proud now and in the future.

Will you discuss McKinsey's commitment to build a diverse and inclusive workforce?

Two thirds of McKinsey Legal colleagues are women. My leadership team includes senior women leaders in key roles like public affairs, strategy, and global operations. Our tech lawyers are an all-star team of predominantly women. So, it's a major priority for me to have leaders from diverse backgrounds on my team. McKinsey Legal's "inclusion and impact" initiative and our focus on "operationalizing respect" for every one of our colleagues worldwide are distinctive and continuous elements for us.

Our firm's commitment to building a diverse and inclusive workforce is integral to our dual mission – to help our clients make substantial, lasting performance improvements and to build a firm that attracts, develops, excites, and retains exceptional people. We believe in developing our talent base, seeking candidates based on their potential, and the desire to continuously learn.

What do you see as McKinsey's responsibility to be engaged in the communities it serves and to be a force for good in society?

As a firm, McKinsey has committed \$2 billion to social responsibility efforts by 2030.

Our research on empowering those in need guides our giving and pro bono programs, and we're maximizing our impact by partnering with nonprofits. This includes efforts we're scaling, such as our Forward program that equips young talent in over 70 countries with the skills to succeed, and our partnership with Generation, a global nonprofit that has trained over 100,000 people for new jobs.

We believe that the capabilities and expertise of our people are our greatest resource. We engage colleagues through volunteering and giving and support them in serving their local communities. Individually, our colleagues invest significant time volunteering, serving on boards, and supporting pro bono engagements.

What advice do you offer to young people beginning their careers?

My sense is that younger people want more from their careers than conventional understandings of professional success. When you talk to young people about music, poetry, yoga, spiritual life – the reactions never cease to inspire and energize me. They are often trying to figure out, and answer the question, "How can I have not just a meaningful career, but a meaningful life?"

My advice is to boldly pursue both – a meaningful career and a meaningful life. It means always pushing yourself to develop and strengthen your expertise, whatever your field. And it means bringing your whole human self to work – your interests, your passions, your values – because all of these things inform the way you think, and ultimately, the way you solve problems and help others. ●

“McKinsey's legal and public affairs function is an extraordinary group of nearly 300 colleagues in 66 locations worldwide. While each day is different, my broad focus has been transforming our professional function and fostering an ethos of solution orientation that will stand the test of time.”