

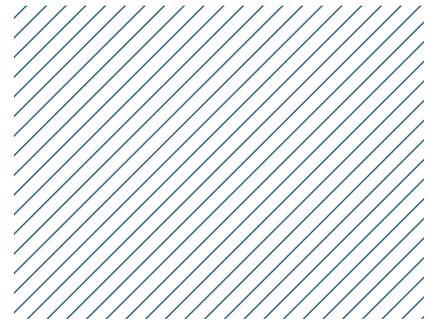


WHATSAPP ASSOCIATE GENERAL COUNSEL SHARES CAREER ADVICE

A Conversation with Ashish Chandra on Leadership, Mentoring in a time of unprecedented instability

Interview by Ethisphere

In the following interview, Ethisphere's Aarti Maharaj spoke to Ashish Chandra, Associate General Counsel - India, WhatsApp Inc, about his work as a senior lawyer at the popular smartphone app. Chandra also highlighted that when it comes to building one's career, think about it as a 50-over one-day cricket tournament.



Ethisphere: How has your career developed over the years?

Ashish Chandra: I never planned to be a corporate lawyer, but you can't control your destiny. After getting into law, very early in my career, I decided to focus on information technology laws as a specialization in addition to my regular day-to-day corporate law advisory. For this, I received a specialized diploma in cyber laws from Indian Law Institute, New Delhi, and a specialized diploma in IPR laws from National Law School of India University, Bangalore. I was fortunate, and with the blessings of my parents, I got the opportunity to work with some of the best technology companies.

In 2005, I secured the opportunity to work with eBay when it entered India after acquiring "baazee.com". At eBay, I gained experience working with regulators and industry bodies to shape various internet, commerce, and payments laws, and handle various tech litigations and law enforcement issues. The legal and regulatory eco-system that was developed in India during those days has supported the astounding growth of today's Internet business.

With my experience in eCommerce, media and technology, I got the opportunity to work with Reliance Jio, India's telecom giant, to build one of the world's largest and most advanced telecom networks and digital businesses. At Reliance Jio, my team forged multi-billion-dollar telecom network technology deals and helped lay down the foundation of its various over-the-top media businesses.

Thereafter, I returned to the eCommerce industry and helped Snapdeal grow from a small start up to an industry leader at its peak. At Snapdeal, my team closed the very first investment deal of Softbank in India and thereafter closed various fund raises close to two billion dollars. Snapdeal also ventured into various businesses through multiple acquisitions including the then largest Internet acquisition of Freecharge, valuing US\$450 million. At Snapdeal, my team successfully handled the first ever eCommerce-related foreign investment and competition law litigations.

It has been a little over a year since I joined WhatsApp and have been helping the company to navigate various legal, litigation (including five cases before the Indian Supreme Court) and regulatory challenges.

Post Snapdeal, at Netflix I structured and negotiated various technical integration and business development deals to make Netflix available on various third-party platforms and networks and won two litigations against the first few major titles on Netflix.

It has been a little over a year since I joined WhatsApp and have been helping the company to navigate various legal, litigation (including five cases before the Indian Supreme Court) and regulatory challenges to provide safe and secure private communications, digital payments, and conversational commerce platform to over 400 million users in India.

Over past few years and with the support of excellent leadership, the industry has been kind to award me and my teams with various awards notably:

- Awarded “Young Achievers Awards – under 40 years of age” in 2015
- Awarded “Largest Internet Acquisition in India” (Snapdeal’s acquisition of Freecharge at ~US\$450mn) 2015
- Hon’ble mention in “Legal500 top Indian General Counsels 2016”
- Snapdeal’s legal team won “Best legal team in eCommerce segment” in 2016
- Awarded as “Best General Counsel in Indian eCommerce industry” in 2017

Ethisphere: Describe a typical day for you at work?

AC: As with everyone, my typical day changed post COVID-19. Days are getting longer and work never seems to end. I stay motivated throughout the day as I

get to work on what I like the most. I am also grateful for the additional time to spend with my family.

This is such an exciting time to be part of the WhatsApp’s journey in India that it’s hard to predict how the next day or next week will look like. Agility is key. One day you are handling issues surrounding a new business model, the other day you get to prepare to defend a public interest litigation, and the next day handle a regulatory or law enforcement escalation.

Given this work schedule, I ensure I spend time with my wife and my 13-year-old son. During weekends, I catch up on new releases on Netflix, Hotstar and Amazon Prime, try cooking, writing articles and attend one or two professional webinars.

Ethisphere: How would you describe your leadership style?

AC: Leadership starts from how one leads his/her own life and grow and inspire others. In a professional setup, one tends to lead three type of stakeholders. (i) Our own team where you lead from within, (ii) Your colleagues where you lead in parallel, and (iii) Your external support system, i.e., your external counsels where you lead from outside. In my experience, a great leader is one who can demonstrate leadership with all stakeholders. It’s relatively easier to lead (or say ‘manage’) your own team however, it takes a strong character to lead from outside. In my career, on one hand, I lead a team of 25 and on other hand, I had navigated challenges while being an independent contributor but leading a team of my colleagues and external counsels. I try and set up good internal systems that support our individual decisions. I feel proud that most of my past team members are now leading the legal departments of successful companies.

Ethisphere: What types of issues keep you up at night?

AC: God has gifted me sweet and sound sleep. However, I do worry about how the global trade and commerce will evolve post COVID-19 and how it will have an impact on the jobs and on the society at large. During these times, our number one priority in life, above our happiness and above our work, should be our and our family’s health and wellbeing.

Ethisphere: What are your thoughts on adjusting to the “new normal” way of life?

AC: I am likely to be working from home until end of 2020. Therefore, it is critical for me to get adjusted to the “new normal” especially when you work in a large global company and have your colleagues

across different time-zones. I believe the key here is how to master a smooth and quick transition from balancing work to health to family time.

Ethisphere: Following the global pandemic, what are some things that might permanently change?

AC: The world will change for good as well for worst. I believe the internet industry will grow at a faster pace, and that has been witnessed by the recent surge in the stock price of various prominent internet industry leaders. COVID-19 could be the Y2K moment for HealthTech and EduTech. Legal profession would see a significant shift in adoption of technology, growth in outsourcing, exciting opportunities for cyber security and digital forensics and evidence practice. Young lawyers will feel more empowered and motivated as they would be ahead in adoption of newer technology and understanding of the techno-legal issues. The gig economy will boom as employer-employee relationship will get redefined. Social and family values will change, and for good, as you would want to restrict your socialization to important people in life. Friends will become good friends, but acquaintances may not become friends.

Ethisphere: Any nuggets of advice that you would share with younger lawyers that have been beneficial for you?

AC: I regret not having a mentor. Whatever I did was based on my instinct and limited feedback from my friends and family. In general, I would advise my younger friends to anchor their career and not adjust it to the surrounding circumstances. Legal profession is neither a T-20 cricket match nor it’s a 5-day test match. Play it like a 50-over one-day cricket and build your innings mid-way. For those who are in-house counsels, practice LAWBI, i.e., legal acumen with business intelligence. Lastly, pick one new topic every six months and write an article or publish blogs. Write to learn, not to teach, and stay available to step outside of your comfort zone and solve brand new problems.

Expert Biography

 **Ashish Chandra** is presently working as Associate General Counsel of WhatsApp Inc. and leads the legal and regulatory affairs of WhatsApp for India. In the past, he has worked with various large Indian and US companies like Netflix, eBay, Reliance Jio & Snapdeal. Over last 20 years, Ashish has firsthand witnessed and contributed to the growth of Internet business and related regulations and jurisprudence in India.