

## Recap: “Venture Capital Speaker Series: Stephanie Brecher, General Counsel of New Enterprise Associates”

By Claire Oxford, J.D. Candidate 2018 | October 9, 2015

How does a Berkeley Law graduate end up as the General Counsel of one of Silicon Valley’s top venture capital firms? What does a day in the life of a General Counsel look like and what are the best steps to take to reach a similar prestigious career?

On September 29, Stephanie Brecher, a 1993 U.C. Berkeley Law graduate and General Counsel of New Enterprise Associates ([“NEA”](#)), addressed these questions and others to a group of law students in Boalt Hall on the U.C. Berkeley campus.

Ms. Brecher discussed her path from Berkeley Law to NEA. In the start of her career, she described herself as an “accidental tourist” in corporate law. After graduation, Ms. Brecher held a clerkship in the Central District of California. Upon completion of her clerkship, she decided not to take the position she had initially planned on, and instead she accepted a position as an associate at Steptoe & Johnson in Washington, D.C., where she hoped to work in international law, but was placed on the corporate team. After this position she worked as in-house counsel in Silicon Valley and spent nearly a decade at Nortel. Following her time at Nortel, Ms. Brecher returned to work at a law firm and became a partner at Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton before she acquired her position at NEA.

Ms. Brecher discussed how NEA invests in a broad range of industries, from healthcare to share-economy apps. NEA invests in companies in all stages of lifecycles, ranging from start-ups to mature corporations. In addition to the diversity of industry and lifecycle in its investments, NEA has significant geographic diversity, investing in companies across the United States as well as abroad.

Ms. Brecher advised students that to be successful both in venture capital and the legal workplace, attorneys must focus on spotting “red-flags” and concisely summarizing them. She discussed that the day-to-day life of associates involves significant document review and summarization. A typical day for her is spent reading and sending e-mails, talking on the phone, and writing term sheets for NEA’s investments.

Because Ms. Brecher did not immediately realize her interest in corporate law while in law school, she did not take many business classes. She suggested that students interested in venture capital and corporate law should take tax classes, as well as any interest-specific business classes being offered.

Once in the workspace, Ms. Brecher stressed the importance of being strong enough to ask for help. For instance, during her time as in-house counsel, she learned by asking outside counsel numerous questions about their work, and learned as she went along.

Near the end of her talk, Ms. Brecher encouraged students to be opportunistic. Throughout law school and legal careers, opportunities come up at unexpected times—when a chance comes up to be an “accidental tourist,” take it.