Today's **Managing** **Partner**

≡

✉ Sign up

INTERVIEWS

ALA's Amanda Koplos Discusses the Importance of an Operations-Led AI Strategy for Law Firms

December 12, 2025

𝕏   in

Q&A

ALA's Amanda Koplos Discusses the Importance of an Operations-Led AI Strategy for Law Firms

Amanda R. Koplos
Former President of the Association
of Legal Administrators (ALA)
Chief Operating Officer
Shuffield Lowman & Wilson, PA

[Amanda R. Koplos](#) is a former President of the [Association of Legal Administrators (ALA)](#). She is the Chief Operating Officer at Shuffield Lowman & Wilson, PA in Orlando, Florida, and co-host of the "The Mostly Legal" podcast.

In this conversation, Amanda Koplos shares practical insights on AI strategy for law firms at a moment when adoption is accelerating, and midsize firms are scrambling to compete with Big Law's technology investments. As a leader of the Association of Legal Administrators (ALA) and Chief Operating Officer of Shuffield Lowman & Wilson, she has firsthand experience guiding teams through operational change, talent expectations, and the real-world challenges of turning AI buzz into measurable results.

The American Bar Association's [2024 Legal Technology Survey Report](#) shows that AI adoption in law firms has nearly tripled in a year, but many firms still struggle to move from experimentation to execution. From your perspective, what separates firms that are strategically implementing AI from those that are simply testing it?

Amanda Koplos: I would start by saying that almost every firm is trying it out. Even when leadership says, "We're not experimenting with AI," someone inside the firm is experimenting; they're just doing it without telling you. The firms that are having the most success are the ones choosing technology strategically to solve specific problems and improve real processes.

If you're buying the latest, shiniest software because the firm down the street bought it or because a vendor had a flashy demo, you're not setting

yourself up for success. Right now, we're being inundated with new products. It feels like the dot-com boom all over again; everyone has a cool domain, and if you don't, you're falling behind. Firms feel that pressure.

The interesting part is that once firms actually examine their processes, they often realize that many of their pain points could be solved with the tools already in their tech stack. They're not fully using what they have.

It's also easy to get overwhelmed by the sheer number of problems you could solve. The firms that are doing well are taking a focused approach: using AI for timekeeping, improving billing efficiencies, complying with outside counsel guidelines, or transcribing meetings. They identify defined use cases and execute them. If you just turn on Copilot and tell your team, "Go forth and create," those are the firms that will fail.

And that's been true with technology even before AI. Replace AI with document management software, practice management software, and you'll see the same patterns.

You have to use technology to solve a real problem, not throw tech at something that wasn't a problem to begin with. Otherwise, you're just creating more problems.

So would you say firms should take stock and ask, "Where are our slowdowns? Where are processes breaking down?" Almost without thinking about technology at first?

Amanda Koplos: Exactly. Where are the cogs in the wheel? Is client intake taking too long? Is the matter opening slowly? Are receivables dragging? Which parts of the operation are causing delays? Then use technology to solve that problem. If you don't have enough work, investing in an AI-powered research platform shouldn't be your priority. You should be looking at AI in marketing, SEO, and digital outreach. It's about understanding your firm's pain points and using technology to address them, rather than buying something just because it has two shiny letters in the name.

Generative AI is changing how firms deliver legal work and interact with clients. How are you seeing law firm leaders balance innovation with client expectations around quality, transparency, and billing models?

Amanda Koplos: Every few years, someone claims it's the death of the billable hour. AI is the first technology that could actually make that true. You can't charge clients for the time you spent on something and simultaneously pay for software that makes that task take less time. It's counterintuitive. At some point, it simply won't hold. There's a breaking point where the model becomes unsustainable.

What firms will move toward is results-based billing. People like to call it "value billing," but let's be honest: it's billing for outcomes. If you draft an estate plan and you charge the client a set fee, they're thrilled because the deliverable protects their legacy. If you did it faster by using automation or AI, great.

Clients aren't naïve. We're already seeing comments like: "You billed me an hour for this, and I could have gotten the same thing from ChatGPT in ten seconds. Why should I pay you?" We saw similar pushback when law libraries went digital and when online legal form services arrived. This is not a uniquely AI-driven issue. It's the fundamental difference between selling results and selling time.

Some clients insist you must use AI; others insist you absolutely must not use it. That's where transparency matters. Clients are flooded with misinformation: hallucinations, security fears, confidentiality risks. And those concerns aren't unfounded, but the technology is evolving quickly. We now have redaction and encryption tools that scrub client data before it ever hits a large language model. You can use certain platforms safely because sensitive information never enters the system in a readable form. The problems we worried about six months ago are already being engineered around.

Generative AI is powerful, but it's nowhere near ready to practice law. Lawyers will have to sell clients on the value of the results they deliver, not the minutes it took to deliver them.

Measuring ROI on legal tech investments is notoriously difficult. What frameworks or metrics have you seen firms use effectively to demonstrate tangible returns from AI and automation?

Amanda Koplos: ROI can be defined in a couple of different ways. There's the

obvious financial return: how much value the firm gets relative to the cost. But there's also ROI in terms of attorney satisfaction and quality of work. If a first-year associate is spending hours digging through 500 documents, trying to remember whether an agreement was drafted for a particular person seven or eight years ago, and now they can instantly find it and get to real legal work, that matters. There's a real happiness component when attorneys are doing substantive work instead of administrative digging.

Another ROI metric is workforce efficiency. You may reduce administrative headcount or upskill the staff you already have. We don't need legal assistants taking dictation anymore. We don't need them drafting template responses to discovery. Even something as simple as calendaring—"Find six times the partners are available"—Copilot can do it in minutes. So part of the ROI comes from reducing administrative burden and frustration, or shifting existing staff into more meaningful, career-forward roles. A legal assistant who wants to become a paralegal will have a more interesting job if they're not spending their day doing repetitive manual tasks.

Ultimately, ROI still comes back to the bottom line. Law firms are businesses and exist to make money. Firms either absorb the cost of technology or offset it somewhere else. You can squeeze staffing, squeeze real estate, or raise rates. You're not cutting lawyer compensation. What I've seen recently is more firms adopting administrative or technology fees. CPA firms have been doing this for years. Now law firms are adding a 1%, 2%, or even 3% line item to cover tech costs.

There's also flat-fee and results-based billing. And there are situations where the technology itself can be billed back to clients, like certain research tools that charge per matter. Vendors entering the market are starting to understand this dynamic. I'm seeing fewer seat-based models that require 100 licenses at $20 per seat and more usage-based pricing. They're realizing firms can't just layer one subscription on top of another endlessly.

It's a difficult conversation because, frankly, firms are going to have to absorb a lot of these expenses. And that's nothing new. The first time firms bought Xerox machines back in the 60s and 70s, they swallowed the cost. Same with the first Lexis or Westlaw subscription when law libraries disappeared. The first time they replaced a server or licensed Microsoft Office on a per-seat basis, it was painful. But firms are still profitable. We've always managed to adapt, and we'll do the same with AI.

You mentioned the happiness factor. Do you see that being especially relevant as younger lawyers enter the workforce? Is there an expectation that firms need to provide modern tools to attract talent?

Amanda Koplos: Exactly. And this is where mid-size firms will feel the pressure. They're going to have to spend more on technology to recruit associates from larger firms. Big firms already have massive resources: prompt libraries, AI teams, and entire innovation departments. If a mid-size firm wants to compete for that same talent, they're not going to win by offering a downgrade.

A young associate isn't going to walk away from a place where they had access to Copilot or a full suite of AI tools and then join a firm that expects them to work without those resources. It's the same thing we saw with research tools 20 years ago. Once associates experienced Lexis or Westlaw at a top firm, they weren't willing to go somewhere that expected them to dig through physical books in the library. It's the same concept repeating itself, just at a much larger scale with AI.

Change management often determines whether new technology succeeds or stalls. What practical steps have you found most effective in addressing attorney resistance and fostering a culture of adoption? And what strategies do you recommend for firm administrators or managing partners who need to oversee complex technology initiatives without getting lost in the technical weeds?

Amanda Koplos: First, firms need to look at their recent projects, specifically where they've succeeded and where they've failed. If a firm rolled out a document management system in the last three years and only 40% of people are using it, that's not a high success rate. Before introducing any AI tool, leadership needs to understand why attorneys aren't using the tools they already have.

A lot of firms jump straight to "Let's add more technology," as if that fixes the underlying issue. It doesn't. If teams didn't receive personalized training, ongoing training, or any form of continued optimization, adoption will always be low. Sometimes firms don't invest in consultants who can reevaluate how

tools are configured or ensure updates are actually being applied. That groundwork matters.

The second piece is one of the core lessons of change management: people will only fully engage if they see personal relevance. If a tool doesn't improve their work or their daily life, they won't adopt it. With AI, that relevance is highly individualized. It varies by role and level of experience. A senior partner will not benefit from the same features that a first-year associate or a legal assistant will benefit from.

That means adoption strategies have to be tailored. Training needs to be structured by the audience. If you tell a senior partner that AI will help them find documents faster, it won't resonate because they don't search for their own documents. They call someone and say, "Send me a copy." So positioning that feature as a reason for them to attend training is pointless. It's not solving their problem.

Which connects back to where we started: firms need to look at their processes and understand where they need support. Then you align the tool to the need, not force tools on people who won't use them.

Amanda Koplos: Exactly. If you start from process pain points, you can show attorneys how a specific tool makes their work easier. That's how you overcome resistance. Not by overwhelming them with technology, but by proving its value in the context of their role.

Looking ahead, how do you see the role of the law firm administrator evolving as generative AI, data analytics, and automation become more embedded in daily operations?

Amanda Koplos: Two years ago, I knew nothing about AI. Now, it's a major part of my work. Here's my hot take, one that isn't always popular until people sit with it: leading AI initiatives is not an IT function. IT can manage security, vendor selection, and technical implementation, but the rest of it is operations. Strategy, process evaluation, pain-point analysis, interviewing end users, identifying champions and influencers, and managing resistance—those things are not what IT is trained to do.

Legal administrators and operations professionals are becoming AI strategists. We're adding that to our resumes because no one came into this with more expertise than anyone else. Even your IT team learned this at the same time the rest of us did. We all started from essentially the same baseline in late 2023. The firms that hand AI over to IT, especially if their team is small and built around break/fix help desk support, are not going to be as successful. You need leaders who think strategically and understand that this isn't about "products," it's about improving processes.

And that requires people who understand the legal side of the business, not just the technology side.

Amanda Koplos: Yes. IT teams are excellent at technology, but they're not always fluent in how legal work is actually done. They'll fix problems, but

they may not fix processes. You need someone who can speak the language of the law and the language of technology. That's where administrators come in.

So you see this as a real opportunity for legal administrators to pivot and build a new skill set?

Amanda Koplos: Absolutely. Personally, I'm finding ways to make the tasks I used to do faster and easier so I can spend more time on strategy. Take financial statements. I used to spend hours preparing summaries or board reports. Now I can do that in 10 minutes, and the extra time goes toward building our Copilot implementation plan. That's the evolution of this role.

When I started in the industry 20 years ago, my job was small and tactical: make sure the server room had power and air conditioning, and if it was your weekend to take home the backup tapes, do it. Today, technology touches 20, 30, sometimes 40 percent of my job. It's become a people function, a process function, and a financial function. None of that is purely IT. It is operations, and that's exactly where legal administrators thrive.

Get the free newsletter

Subscribe for news, insights and thought leadership curated for the law firm audience.

Email *

Sign up

Read this next

How Small Law Firms Can Use Year-End Reviews to Build Stronger Operations

Building a Stronger Case: What Effective Partnership Submissions Should Include

Leadership Stability Through Thoughtful Succession Planning

Strengthening Law Firm Marketing ROI for Smarter, More Profitable Growth

Be a leader in the know

Sign up for timely and substantive law firm news and analysis delivered weekly to your inbox.

Email *

Sign up

Advertise

Contact

About

Newsletter

Webinars

Topics

Subscribe

Follow us in

Privacy Policy

Terms of Service