LEGAL MANAGEMENT

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How Law Firms Are Achieving Billable Hour Success

The support firms provide can encourage buy-in from both clients and employees.

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The Harmony of Many Voices

When many people are talking about a single topic, the discourse can seem loud and indecipherable. But sometimes, the conversation can be wonderfully harmonious, leaving us wanting more.

In legal, the billable hour is one of the topics that is much-discussed and yet continues to evolve. Of course, the billable hour conversation is not new. In a recent article introducing himself to readers as the new Editor of *The American Lawyer*, David Gialanella quips that he was writing feature articles as far back as 2008 asking if the death of the billable hour is coming.

Today's realities show that compensation structures for attorneys continue to change. Some law firms and legal departments may offer billable hour credits or reduced billable hour expectations for attorneys actively engaged in diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) activities. This recognizes that time spent on DEI initiatives is valuable to the firm's overall goals.

> "Today's realities show that compensation structures for attorneys continue to change. Some law firms and legal departments may offer billable hour credits or reduced billable hour expectations for attorneys actively engaged in diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) activities."

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) is also driving a shift toward flat rates and alternate fee arrangements. *Law.com* reporter Andrew Maloney reports that, "Average billing rate increases were high last year, perhaps historically so, and some industry observers already expect a similar 2024." Highlighting the many different — and sometimes contradictory — perspectives about the billable hour, Ken Crutchfield, Vice President and General Manager of Legal Markets at Wolters Kluwer Legal & Regulatory U.S. predicts that generative AI will have all the following effects on law firms:

- Rates will go up.
- Rates will go down.
- Work will shift to alternate fee arrangements.
- Work will go in-house.

Whether you agree with Crutchfield or not, the conversations continue, including among ALA's members. ALA's Online Community is the forum where members can share their unique experiences and challenges about developing and administering billable hours policies and protocols. Members can also ask their peers questions about how their firms are tackling the issue of billable hours and learn how it is being addressed in firms and organizations of varying sizes, structures and practice areas.

ALA has provided insights on the topic in the content we make available such as:

- In this issue of *Legal Management*, the cover story, "How Law Firms Are Achieving Billable Hour Success," describes the many ways firms are adapting and modernizing their billable hour policies to keep clients happy. (See page 16.)
- The *Legal Management* article "How to Ease Time Tracking Struggles" discusses how to make sure time tracking is done efficiently and accurately. (See the June 2023 issue.)
- ALA's Compensation and Benefits Survey offers insight into how firms decide billable hour goals for attorneys and paralegals.

Plus, stay tuned to *Legal Management Talk* in March, when ALA's podcast will have an episode on the billable hour and other arrangements, such as value-based pricing.

Despite the large and often crowded chorus of people lending their voices to the topic of billable hours, ALA's unique voices blend with harmonious clarity that enable our members, business partners and staff to succeed in a future that requires innovative thinking and agile responsiveness to change.

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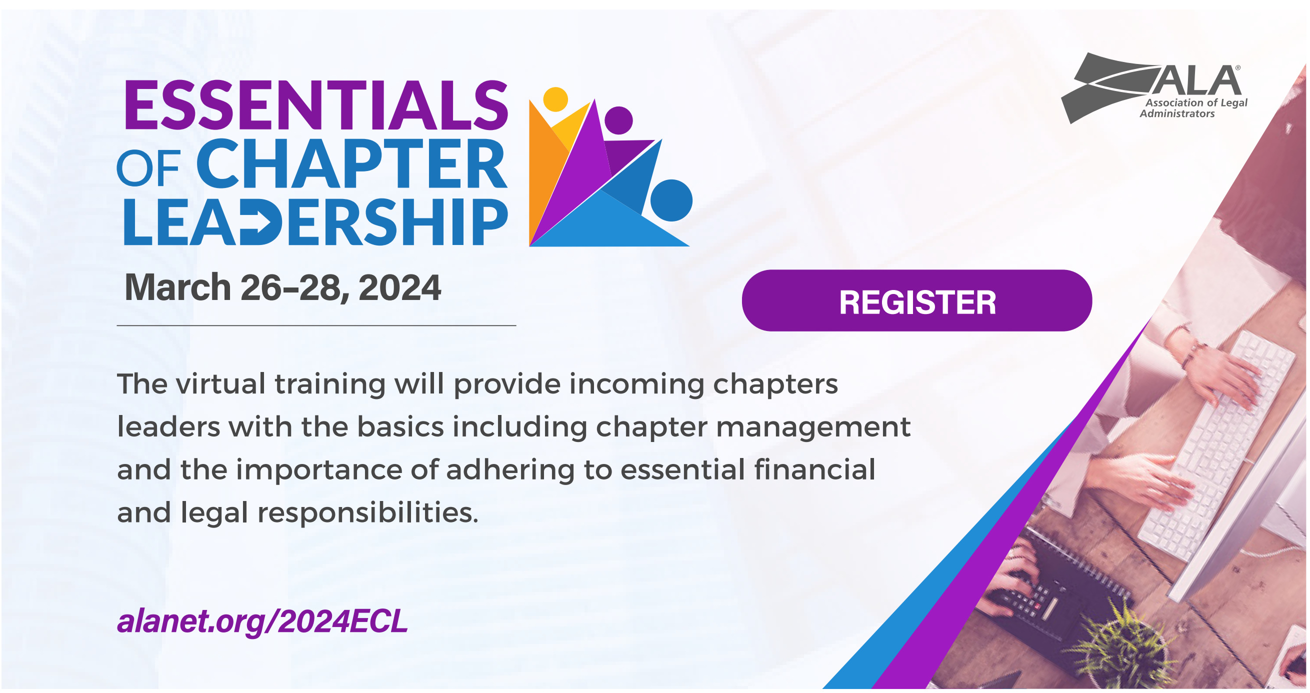

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GARY G. ALLEN, Esq.
Founder and Head of Operations
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“Mapping a client’s financial life cycle is essential for law firms to optimize profitability, maintain transparency and provide exceptional client service.”

Mapping a Client’s Financial Life Cycle: From Intake to Archive

Understanding how clients experience their financial relationship with a law firm is crucial for building trust — and every step in the client’s financial life cycle can strengthen or weaken this relationship.

This article offers a guide to effectively map the financial life cycle of a client with a law firm, from client intake to case closure and archival. These guidelines build trust with clients by enhancing transparency, predictability and the client experience while boosting profitability and ensuring the firm’s financial interests are met.

CLIENT INTAKE

The financial life cycle begins with client intake. Clear communication about fees, billing and payment terms is vital. Tips to keep mind include the following:

- **Initial consultation:** Conduct a comprehensive consultation to assess the client’s needs. Clearly explain the fee structure, including hourly rates, flat fees or contingency arrangements. Approach this discussion with empathy.
- **Engagement letters:** Use the engagement letter to align expectations. It should outline the scope of work, staffing, expected costs and payment terms. Request a preauthorized electronic payment method to align with payment expectations. Ensure clients understand and sign these documents.
- **Retainer agreements:** Reduce payment risk with a retainer agreement, defining how client funds will be deposited, held and billed against. Ensure your firm’s processes comply with ethical and legal standards.

BILLING AND INVOICING

Effective billing and invoicing maintain transparency and client satisfaction:

- **Time tracking:** Track time accurately, regardless of billing method (hourly, fixed fee or contingent). Provide guidelines for descriptions that demonstrate the work's value and comply with client e-billing guidelines.
- **Expense management:** Monitor and record client-related expenses, preparing them for billing in accordance with client requirements.
- **Invoice generation:** Create detailed invoices specifying services, hours, expenses, payment due dates and methods. Send invoices promptly to set expectations for prompt payment.
- **Regular review:** Track work in progress, billed and collected fees in real time. Implement automated reminders and follow-ups for unpaid accounts. Consider outsourcing collection assistance if necessary.

PAYMENTS AND COLLECTIONS

Efficient payment and collection processes are vital:

- **Payment methods:** Offer multiple payment options, including electronic methods. Ensure clients can easily pay electronically to reduce time spent on manual payment processing.
- **Timely follow-up:** Implement a system for tracking overdue payments and follow up promptly. Automation can make this process more efficient.
- **Payment plans:** Consider using payment processors that offer payment plans to clients, reducing payment risk for the firm.

EXPENSE MANAGEMENT

Effective expense management controls costs including:

- **Budgeting:** Develop a budget for each case and monitor expenses to stay within budget constraints.
- **Expense authorization:** Implement clear protocols for expense authorization and documentation to prevent unauthorized spending.

CASE CLOSURE AND ARCHIVE

Systematically wrap up financial aspects and archive relevant information with the following:

- **Final invoicing:** Generate a final invoice that accounts for all billable hours and expenses, outlining any outstanding balances. Ensure clients receive correspondence confirming case conclusion.
- **Retainer reconciliation:** If applicable, reconcile the client's retainer balance, refunding any unearned portion.
- **Archive documents:** Safeguard case-related documents, communications and financial records according to legal and ethical requirements, implementing a secure archiving system for easy retrieval.

Mapping a client's financial life cycle is essential for law firms to optimize profitability, maintain transparency and provide exceptional client service. Effective client intake, clear billing and invoicing, efficient payment and collection procedures, rigorous expense management, and systematic case closure and archiving are all essential components of this strategy. By implementing these strategies, law firms can achieve financial stability while building client trust and maintaining ethical and regulatory compliance throughout the client engagement journey.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gary Allen, Esq., is a Founder and Head of Operations at LeanLaw, a legal timekeeping, invoicing and reporting software company, as well as a partner at Givens Pursley LLP where he has practiced law for 30+ years. He was only three years out of Stanford Law School when the firm he was working for imploded. It happened again three years later. He was left without a job. Those experiences created a passion in Allen to help law firms be better businesses, with efficient operations, streamlined financial management and a laser focus on profitability.

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Legal Administrator, Helmers + Associates; Vice Chair, ALA's Committee on DEIA

"Integrating a tapestry of viewpoints into our decision-making processes not only allows us to mitigate blind spots, but also unlock the potential for groundbreaking advancements in legal administration."

How Your Firm Can Benefit from a Supplier Diversity Program

Wouldn't it be great if you could look at the important values and goals of your company and match those with a supplier and/or a third-party vendor? Fortunately, through a supplier diversity program (SDP), you can!

Although it does take just a little bit of work to implement a successful SDP, the benefits are clear. Creating and implementing an SDP requires employing diverse businesses to meet your law firm's needs. In turn, this creates value, increased exposure and increased opportunities to provide quality representation to your clients.

WHY IS SUPPLIER DIVERSITY IMPORTANT?

SDPs are an organization's policy of actively seeking out suppliers that are owned and operated by individuals from underrepresented groups. These groups may include women, LGBTQ+ individuals, persons with disabilities, veterans and/or minorities. To qualify as a diverse supplier, the company must have at least 51% ownership by an individual from one of these underrepresented backgrounds.

While diversity in the legal industry continues to trend slightly upward in terms of recruitment, hiring and retention, when creating an effective SDP, firms must make a concerted effort to explore all the ways their company would benefit from using diverse suppliers for goods and services.

Having a continued and long-term partnership with a business that you know, rely upon and trust is the key to providing your clients with the best service possible. Seeking opportunities to collaborate with diverse suppliers can lead to increased brand awareness and greater exposure to clients and businesses that value diversity, equity and inclusion.

WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE?

There are numerous agencies and resources available to help your firm get started should you encounter any barriers to creating an SDP. For example, the National Minority Supplier Diversity Counsel, Supplier Diversity Champions and the National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce are all organizations that can help you move forward with procuring diverse contracts. Don't forget to reach out to your local Chamber of Commerce or Small Business Administration to find and employ local business vendors that are in your community. Each of these steps can be critical in moving our industry forward.

A law firm that promotes diversity as one of its core values actively works to strengthen the community in which it practices. Here are a few quick factors to consider when seeking out diverse business suppliers and vendors:

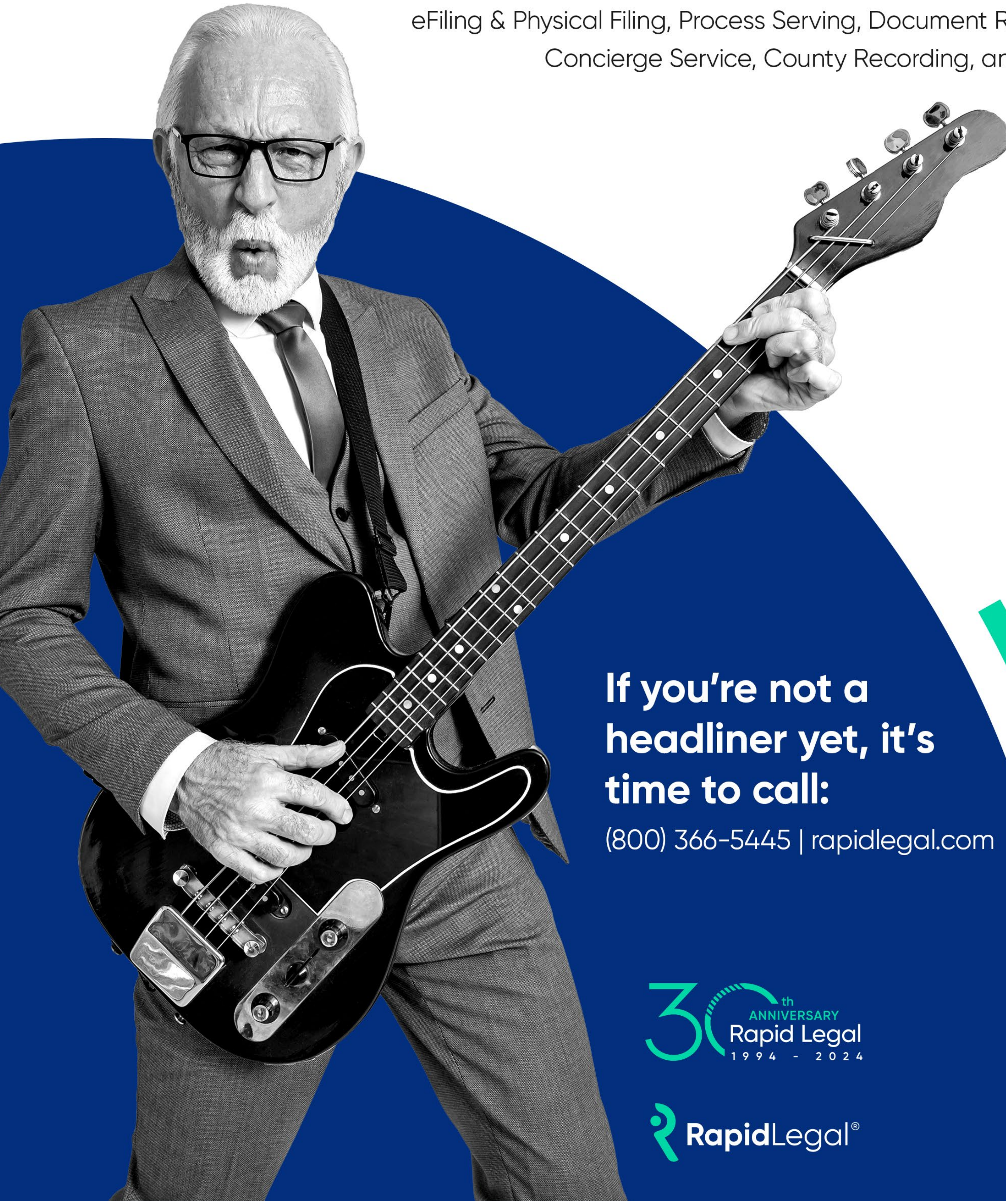
- Is the business at least 51% owned and operated by an individual or a group that is traditionally underrepresented and underserved?
- Does the business operate in your firm's community?
- Do the business' values reflect your firm's core principles and values?

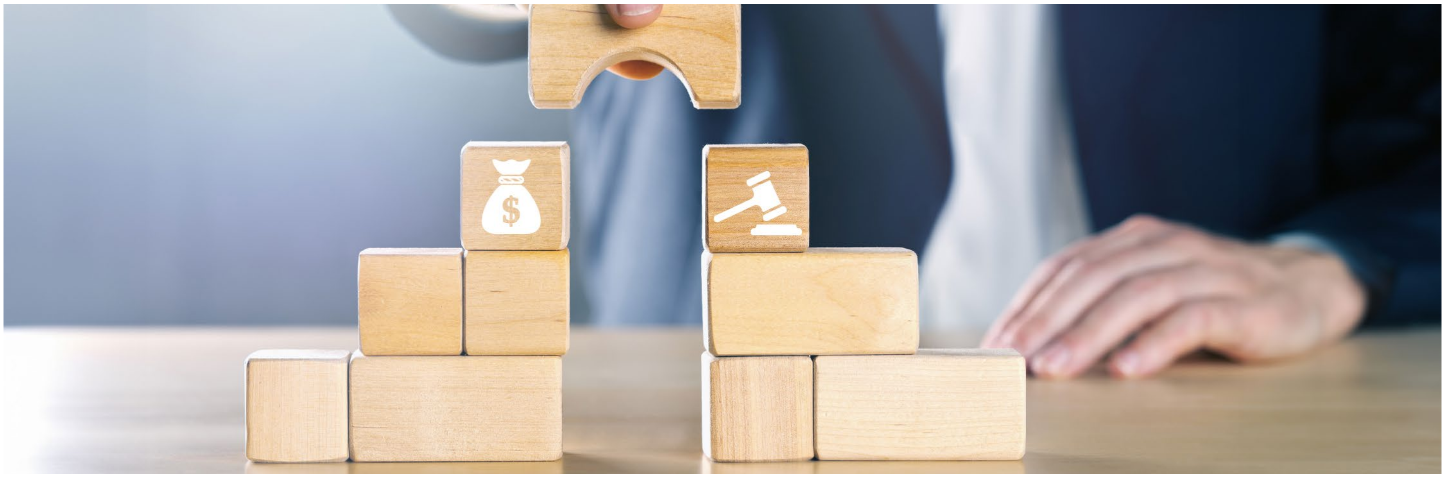
Not every business relationship is a match made in heaven. However, once you realize the importance of supplier diversity in your firm's everyday needs and make a strategic plan in seeking and establishing those relationships, then the opportunities and value added to your firm will be remarkable.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Janae D. Martin is Legal Administrator at Helmers + Associates in Louisville, Kentucky. She is the 2023–2024 Vice Chair of ALA's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) Committee.

alanet.org/resources/diversity





MIKE ROSS
LexCheck
Chief Customer Officer and Head of Business Development

“Traditionally, most tasks related to contract negotiations fall under legal. Many organizations bundle contract negotiation and execution together when, in actuality, sales and legal teams should share responsibility.”

AI: The Key to Bridging the Gap Between Legal and Sales Teams

Legal and sales teams frequently live in separate worlds. Salespeople want to close deals quickly to hit targets, while legal departments must protect their companies from risk. But both teams support the organization in achieving the same ultimate goal: securing customers and revenue. Thankfully, technology has come to the point where it can help resolve interdepartmental friction to accelerate contract approval.

Sales cycles dramatically lengthened over the last year — many now stretch more than two weeks longer than in 2022. Extended contract negotiations are costly, resulting in lost customers and revenue. More than half of companies report inefficient contract processes costing them business. Unfortunately, legal departments often still carry the reputation of being a “bottleneck” in the sales process, but delays don’t have to be part of the contract process. To expedite approvals, organizations should transition contract negotiation from a legal task to a shared responsibility.

Technology can help legal and sales departments collaborate to accelerate deals.

SALES AND LEGAL RELATIONSHIP CHALLENGES

The sometimes discordant nature of the relationship between sales and legal stretches back decades. Sales teams often feel that legal teams are too slow or cautious, while legal teams think sales teams are too willing to take risks. This disconnect creates frustrations on both sides.

Traditionally, most tasks related to contract negotiations fall under legal. Many organizations bundle contract negotiation and execution together when, in actuality, sales and legal teams should share responsibility. Most organizations’ processes happen within functional silos. Sales and procurement people do extensive work before delivering a contract to the legal team, which then redlines and approves the document in isolation. The organization is better served if both departments collaborate from the beginning.

Legal professionals should support salespeople during the sales process to understand each contract's goals and identify potential risks, such as increased liability or problematic payment structures. This approach gets everyone on the same page, reduces back-and-forth discussions between departments and accelerates deal approval.

HOW CAN LEGAL AND SALES TEAMS BRIDGE THE GAP?

Businesses can leverage technology to enhance communication and reduce friction in the contracting process. The right solutions streamline many functions.

Collaboration

The sales department typically completes its work within customer relationship management (CRM) software and then kicks documents to the legal department, which uses contract lifecycle management solutions in its processes.

This workflow creates inefficiencies, such as the extra steps to transition documents between programs. Version control becomes difficult as emails fly back and forth between departments. Separate tools also impede visibility, preventing staff from seeing a document's status and leading to overlapping efforts.

Technology integration overcomes these challenges by creating a centralized database where both parties can collaborate. Integrated tools enable everyone to work on the same document, leave notes and track progress as the contract moves through a clearly defined approval process. Sales and legal leaders can use this visibility to spot and resolve holdups.

Review Processes

Artificial intelligence (AI) streamlines review processes to shorten the sales cycle. Manual contract reviews require significant time and effort, extending approval times. Even the most basic contracts go through multiple rounds of evaluations, tying up lawyers who could be working on more complex and high-value documents.

AI reinvents the workflow. The technology conducts the first review, identifying problem clauses and flagging potential risks faster and more accurately than humans. AI solutions can automatically redline contracts with preferred language and perform an exhaustive risk evaluation previously achievable only through an experienced lawyer's review. Meanwhile, lawyers can focus on resolving the risks rather than identifying them.

Generative AI can further enhance the process by composing initial contract drafts and situation-specific, nonstandard clauses that align with business goals. Such algorithms must be designed specifically for legal use and implemented with thoughtful evaluation.

Sales Team Autonomy

Many contracts required to secure a deal are standard — such as nondisclosure agreements (NDAs) — yet still require legal review. Rather than immediately shifting responsibility for these low-risk documents to the legal department, organizations can empower their sales teams to draft them.

AI trained on the company's legal playbook makes best practices accessible to everyone in the organization. Sales teams can use the algorithm to redline low-risk, high-volume contracts, allowing them to resolve many issues on their own and handle more deals directly. The resulting documents require less work from legal and fast-track negotiations.

Involving sales teams in handling contracts also helps them understand a contract's legal implications, potentially avoiding misunderstandings and delays later in the process and informing future deals.

Technology as a Bridge

The human element is the most critical component of a successful partnership between sales and legal. Technology supports the relationship by removing friction and creating opportunities for renewed collaboration. AI does not replace either job function. Rather, teams can leverage these integrative tools for sharing responsibilities and communicating goals, needs and expectations. The resulting dialogue builds trust and understanding between teams and allows them to work together to efficiently build optimal contracts.

A few items to bear in mind when implementing a solution:

- Consider and acknowledge both teams' needs. Solutions catering to only one department will not receive universal buy-in, ultimately limiting their effectiveness.
- Clearly define workflows and expectations to maximize the solution's benefits and value.
- Monitor and evaluate the new processes' results to ensure utility and identify improvement opportunities.

The functions of sales and legal may seem to place them in separate worlds, but ultimately, these departments are working toward the same goals. Building a bridge to connect them is key to streamlining and strengthening business outcomes. Communication aligns priorities, while AI facilitates collaboration and accelerates review and negotiation. Combining these elements unites efforts, turning sales and legal teams into a powerful, harmonious force.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mike Ross is the Chief Customer Officer at LexCheck. Prior to joining LexCheck, Ross spent five years practicing as a corporate associate for law firms, the last three of which were in the New York office of Ropes & Gray.

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How Law Firms Are Achieving Billable Hour Success

The support firms provide can encourage buy-in from both clients and employees.

An alternative fee arrangement (AFA) — most often, a flat fee — is now used in nearly a quarter of law firms' work, according to Bloomberg Law. Yet billable hour-based pricing is still going strong

A 2023 Association of Corporate Counsel report found more than three-quarters of firms charge outside counsel standard hourly rates for their services, and 8 in 10 legal departments pay a discounted hourly amount for law firms' work.

Provided firms have robust enough data to accurately estimate costs, AFAs can be a good fit for practice areas that involve repetitive processes, such as intellectual property and labor employment, says Robert Kamins, Principal and Founder of Vertex Advisors, which provides financial and other management consulting services to law firms.

However, while some firms may assume their clients, regardless of matter type, would typically prefer an AFA over hourly billing, that's actually not always the case, Kamins says.

"At the end of the day, they're looking for more efficient legal spend," he says. "Many clients don't necessarily love knowing they may have overpaid. Increasingly, what they want more than value is transparency, so they're paying for the actual work performed."

Homing in on a few specific operational aspects can potentially help law firms ensure the billable hour process is a favorable experience for clients — and also produce optimum results internally.

> "Firms are really spending time looking at their financial and hours reporting. Many firms are using dashboards or other data visualization tools to have a great sense of how busy their people are — both individually [and at] a practice, client and matter level, as well — to work efficiently."

CULTURAL CHANGES

The mental health concerns a heavy workload can present have become an increased focus in the legal industry; in a 2021 report that noted attorneys cited billable hours as cause of stress, the New York State Bar Association recommended law firms cap billable hour requirements at 1,800 hours annually.

The same year, public interest law firm Sanford Heisler Sharp increased salaries — and reduced its billable hours minimum from 180 to 160 hours a month. The firm arrived at that number, according to Chairman David Sanford, because trimming 10 hours didn't seem like it would be enough.

"We don't want to burn people out," Sanford says. "We want to make this a sustainable practice and have people be happy with sustainable lives. The thought was everyone would receive a 20-hour reduction as being significant; and we wanted it to be significant."

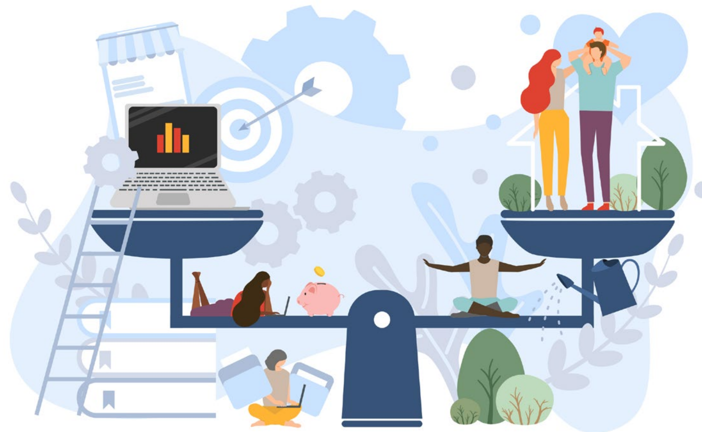
A few factors contributed to the decision to reduce the billable hours target. For one, the firm hoped the new policy would contribute to employee satisfaction and retention. They also factored in efficiency gains achieved through technology enhancements and decreased commute times when working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"You're always thinking about ways of holding onto your best talent," he says. "[Firm members] decided to work for us because they're committed to social justice and civil rights, and they're willing to make economic sacrifices because the work is meaningful and rewarding to them personally — but you also want to compensate your people as much as you possibly can. We thought it made sense to reduce the pressure and the target minimums, and people have appreciated it."

While attorneys may still log long hours when work requires it — leading up to a trial, for example — the firm encourages them to take time off afterward. If some months an attorney works 300 hours, Sanford says, balancing that out with a more relaxed schedule during less busy periods should in theory help balance their average hours to 160 or so a month.

Since the pandemic, Sanford Heisler Sharp, like a number of firms, has also embraced a hybrid work structure. Employees might be in the office some days, and off-site for the rest of the week.

"People think about work-life balance differently because of the pandemic," Sanford says. "They think about being able to be home, work remotely and take care of things during the day from a personal level that, in the past, they weren't able to do as easily because they were expected to be in the office. That's not to say they aren't expected to make up that time; if they take off three hours in the middle of the day, they may have to work in the evening or the weekend — but they have flexibility."



AUGMENTING BUSINESS RESOURCES

Administrative and business development tasks, while important, can chip away at a law firm's utilization rate — which represents how much of an attorney's eight-hour day is spent on billable work. Currently, nearly two-thirds of their workday is underutilized, according to a Clio report.

To maximize hourly billing's profitability, having strong time-tracking and other internal systems in place is crucial.

Technology use has helped 30% of legal professionals finish tasks in less time, according to Bloomberg Law's survey. Almost all firms (91%) have a timekeeping solution in place, and 42% use practice management tools.

"Firms are really spending time looking at their financial and hours reporting," Kamins says. "Many firms are using dashboards or other data visualization tools to have a great sense of how busy their people are — both individually [and at] a practice, client and matter level, as well — to work efficiently."

The data firms are gathering may be able to help them strengthen their hourly billing-related processes — including meeting client requests for detailed information about the employees who perform matter-related work, according to Joseph Samarco, Director of Revenue Operations at Hogan Lovells. He's also a member of ALA's Professional Development Advisory Committee.

> "Clients are really seeing the value again in the service that's provided, and not just the dollar. It's a slow process; depending on the level of income they have or revenue they make, they do want to get the best value — but they understand people have to be paid for what they do."

"Clients look at diversity a lot more now and the law schools attorneys went to," Samarco says. "They want to know how much experience the attorneys have. You have to have all the necessary information prior to submitting an invoice [or] the system won't allow it through. This is not 1998 or 1999, when you could send out a bill and just say services rendered, and the client paid it."

Relatively minor format changes could potentially have a positive impact on billing. Clio's legal trends survey, for instance, found law firms that included an itemized outstanding balances summary on invoices, with an embedded payment link, to follow up about unpaid bills had 26% higher realization rates — representing the percent of billable work that gets invoiced — and 5% higher collection rates than firms that didn't.

Some law firms have invested in personnel to analyze productivity and address issues that occur because bills aren't compliant with clients' e-billing systems — a major cause of payment delays, according to a 2024 report from Citi Global Wealth at Work and Hildebrandt Consulting.

Between 2017 and 2022, 78% of firms added pricing specialists, and 76% increased the number of project managers they employed. Nearly all large firms (95%) invested in data scientists.

All three roles are expected to continue to grow within the next two years — data scientists by 86%; pricing specialists by 70%; and project managers by 60%. A 52% increase in billing and collections professionals is also predicted.

While smaller firms may not have the budgetary resources to add all those functions, having someone — potentially an attorney, staff member or external consultant — examine how time is being spent can be key, Kamins says.

"You don't need to necessarily hire a pricing [or] legal project manager," he says. "But you do need somebody who's focused on the numbers — who wants to get under the hood and understand the mechanics of what it takes to do a matter."

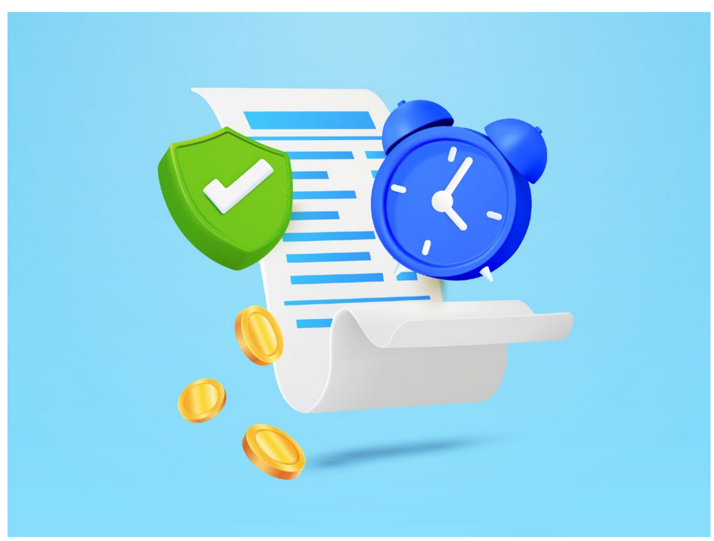
THE CASE FOR CHARGING BY THE HOUR

A billable hours structure can provide several notable benefits. There's less risk of revenue loss if work-related time estimations are off. A number of firms also use hourly billing to gauge achievement and compensation levels.

"Largely, the systems that are core to law firms have been built around the billable hour," Kamins says. "One measure of performance for an attorney, besides quality, is quantity. It's a unit many firms have [used to gauge] the firm's values about how many hours, especially supporting attorneys like associates, or income partners, should be working each year."

Hourly requirements, he says, frequently also play into firms' financial planning.

"A law firm's economic model is really most often hours spent, times your rates, times the number of people you have doing it," Kamins says. "That is how a firm that isn't using purely fixed-fee model, that does use billable hours, in essence has to budget. It's a unit not just of compensation for the individual, but for the accrued revenue of the organization. One of the reasons it's so entrenched [in law firm operations] is that it factors into every conversation and most data reports that firms look at."



To ensure the information firms are drawing compensation and revenue planning conclusions from is accurate, firm leadership may, Kamins says, want to consider enhancing their data tracking practices — for instance, using task and activity codes for all matters.

"There are standard ones in the industry; firms have more specific ones, sometimes clients have specific ones," he says. "That will give you better insight into what things actually cost — which helps you not only manage matters more efficiently but understand your business and have better communication with your clients about what the range of work can cost to really establish trust."

Thorough training and guidance can help ensure attorneys, paralegals and other firm members understand how to track and code their hours.

"If people are not properly recording their time, or they're doing things such as large block billing, as opposed to individual time entries — or generic entries [that] are not descriptive enough to understand what actually occurred and have to be revised later — all of those elements challenge the effectiveness of the billable hour," Kamins says. "It's really important, as an organization, to make sure everybody's on the same page about how to do it."

When pitching their services, law firms may, at times, suggest either an hourly or AFA billing structure — based on factors ranging from how research-intensive the work will be to whether associates, instead of partners, can complete it at a lower rate.

Some clients, regardless, might still push for alternative billing options for certain types of matters; Samarco, though, says he's seen in a shift within the industry over the past year.

"Clients are really seeing the value again in the service that's provided, and not just the dollar," he says. "It's a slow process; depending on the level of income they have or revenue they make, they do want to get the best value — but they understand people have to be paid for what they do."

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Building Natural Rainmakers, One Lawyer at a Time

These tips can help you coach your attorneys on how to build relationships — and business.

In this competitive legal landscape, having attorneys who can sell is critical. But it's not a skill that comes naturally to some and isn't taught much (if at all) in law schools.

Regardless of practice size (and attorney comfort level), it's critical they engage in building a firm's book of business. But inspiring them to do so can be a bit of a challenge.

David Freeman, JD, says reframing is the most crucial element for attorneys with little business development experience. "Most lawyers never received any kind of training in law firm or client business development," says Freeman, a member of the National Law Journal Hall of Fame and creator of Lawyer Book Builder, an online rainmaker training tool for lawyers. (He's also a frequent contributor to *Legal Management* magazine.) "There's often this perception that you've got to sell, you've got to push; it's distasteful, and they don't want to do it. But the reframe is that it's really about relationship building, which everybody has some experience with. It's not about selling anything to anybody," he says.

"There's often this perception that you've got to sell, you've got to push; it's distasteful, and they don't want to do it. But the reframe is that it's really about relationship building, which everybody has some experience with."

The best attorneys will be a well-kept secret if they don't understand that. First and foremost, they have to build their practice of law, says Jennifer Hines, Chief Executive Officer of Accelerated Sales and Leadership, which works with firms on customizing business solutions for growth opportunities. "They have to value the need for developing that business and their practice as much as they do the law that they're specializing in because if it's not prioritized, it's a long difficult road to having a successful practice," she says.

> "A firm I worked with years ago that specialized in estate planning would regularly put on an estate planning event in a very nice restaurant where their workshop was targeted to the client audience they were after."

Here are some steps to consider.

1. Go for Fame and Friendship

Freeman likes to say it's all about fame and friendship. If you guide your attorneys to build from this anchor, you can begin to create a basis for their business development skills.

"Fame means letting people know who you are and what you do." In other words, you can't expect Avvo or Google to be the source of how people find your practice. This "fame" piece can come in many ways. For example, encourage attorneys to attend association events or even to speak at one. Or, consider nudging them into the world of publishing where they can share thought pieces in their practice area. It can even just be a matter of sharing such content with their professional network on LinkedIn.

Look for ways they can get in front of existing clients outside of their day-to-day work. For example, are there opportunities to offer workshops for existing clients? If one of your practice areas is tax law, offer a free session with tax tips. If trust administration is a practice area, work to build relationships with people who do trust administration at banks. Once you've identified contacts, encourage your attorneys to reach out to them, introduce themselves and begin developing relationships. Or if your firm specializes in estate planning, perhaps set up appointments at local senior centers so attorneys can hold seminars.

"A firm I worked with years ago that specialized in estate planning would regularly put on an estate planning event in a very nice restaurant where their workshop was targeted to the client audience they were after," says Hines.

This is an organic way for attorneys to market themselves — and by extension — the firm. Habits like these are engrained in natural-born rainmakers, and they generate value for your firm and help build its reputation — all without sales pressure.

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2. Tell a Good Story About Yourself

Everyone has a story to share, and sharing some of those stories on your firm's biography page is a great way to connect to potential clients. Not painting a persona about who you are or how you are different is a missed business development opportunity.

"Lawyers don't tell a good story about themselves," says Freeman. If you look at their bio or LinkedIn profile, it's typically generic and bland. "It doesn't tell a story of why you are different than someone else doing real estate law or estate planning."

For example, are there stories that can connect attorneys to potential clients? Perhaps an attorney specializes in bankruptcy law because they watched a loved one experience financial struggles. Or, what are some of the firm's biggest success stories? While you may not be able to name the clients in these success stories, sharing some generic details about them can showcase to prospective clients your past wins.

Remember: Potential clients want to know that you've been in this situation before, understand them and their needs, and handle things successfully.

3. Become a 'Wow' Firm

Ever dine at the fanciest restaurant where they think of your every whim? If you're wearing dark clothing, the cloth napkin is dark. If you're wearing light colors, the napkin is white so as not to attract lint. After each course, they sweep the crumbs from your table, comp your dessert without request if the service is delayed, and offer to give the valet your ticket so your car is pulled up in the rain. It's a "wow" restaurant.

Lawyers are in the service industry, too. Ask your attorneys to consider what a "wow" level of service would look like, says Freeman. You want people to say, 'Wow, my lawyer did this,' or 'Wow, she does that.'

"It may not mean anything more than they got back to me quickly, they did a little something extra, they reached out to me with a prospective client," Freeman says. This level of extraordinary service makes the rainmaker stand out from the average attorney when it comes to business development.

It's not just satisfactory service or good service — it's wow service.

4. Be a Giver

There's a book called *Giftology: The Art and Science of Using Gifts to Cut Through The Noise, Increase Referrals, and Strengthen Retention.* The author John Ruhlin has a concept that we all need to become "giverprenuers" to be in the business of giving because if you give, people want to give back.

We aren't talking monetary gifts — gifts can mean your time, energy and expertise. It can be sending a note or messaging someone with an article you think they'll find interesting.

"Giving aligns with many people's personalities because people don't want to be seen as pushy sales takers; they want to be helpful givers," says Freeman.

Some quantitative analysis also suggests that when lawyers inside large firms give work to other lawyers, they make more the following year. If you're giving to many people, people want to give back to you, Freeman adds.

"Every deposit you make into your business development account can yield results and compound down the road, but if you don't deposit now, nothing will grow down the road," says Freeman.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jennifer Nelson is a Florida-based writer who covers business, finance and legal content. Her work appears in Find Law, Legal Zoom, *NextAvenue.org, AARP* and many other publications.

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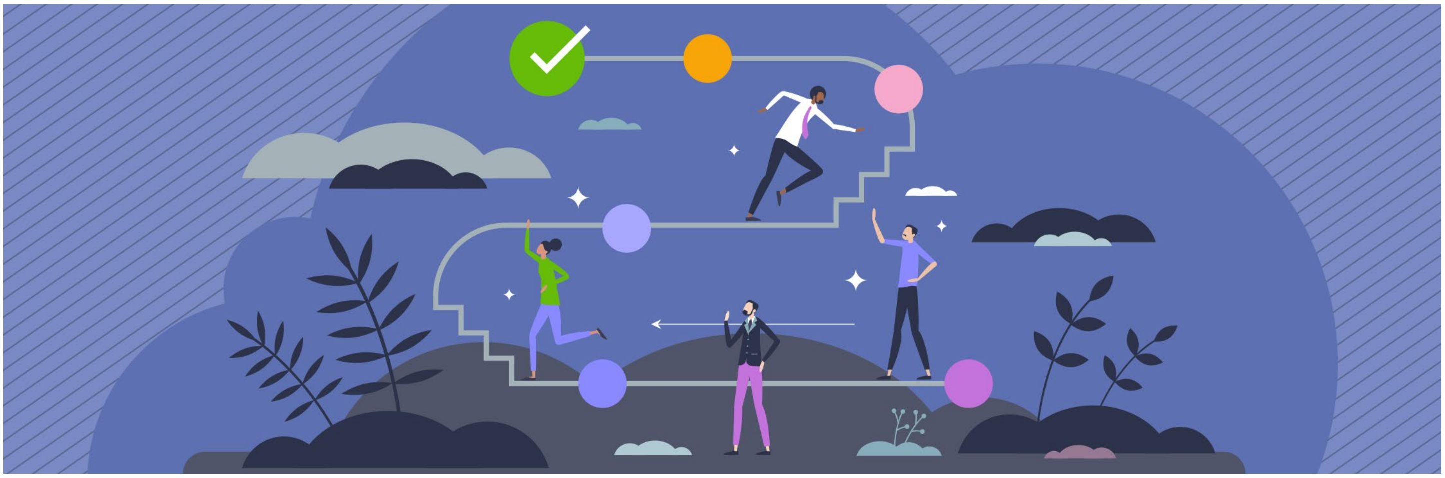

JEFFREY M. KIMMEL
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Building a Client-Centric Law Firm: A Roadmap for Attorneys

The modern legal industry has seen tremendous changes in recent years. With an increasing focus on client satisfaction, law firms have been turning to a more client-centric approach when it comes to managing their businesses. This shift in mindset requires increased attention to detail, as well as greater willingness from firms to accommodate the unique needs of their clients to maximize satisfaction..

In today's competitive legal landscape, law firms must adapt to meet the evolving needs and expectations of their clients. Embracing a client-centric approach to law firm management is not just a buzzword; it's a strategic imperative. Clients are no longer satisfied with traditional legal services alone — they seek value, transparency and exceptional service.

A recent study revealed that 76% of its respondents would stop doing business with a company after just one bad experience. In this article, we'll explore the various strategies law firms can use to better embrace the client-centric approach and further maintain a high client retention rate.

"We live in an age of instant gratification where people have answers right at their fingertips, and products are delivered to our doorstep the same day we order them. So, it makes sense that clients expect their legal needs to be addressed with the utmost importance."

UNDERSTANDING CLIENT-CENTRICITY

One key element of a successful client-centric strategy is an understanding that clients come first. Client-centricity is a philosophy that places clients at the heart of every decision and action taken within a law firm. It involves a deep understanding of client needs, preferences and objectives.

These days, we live in an age of instant gratification where people have answers right at their fingertips, and products are delivered to our doorstep the same day we order them. So, it makes sense that clients expect their legal needs to be addressed with the utmost importance. When clients seek your guidance and help, creating an environment where they feel like a priority is imperative. As you strive to maintain a client-focused practice, you'll develop a "wow factor" that allows you to stand out and significantly increase your chances of client retention.

CONSIDER THE CLIENT'S JOURNEY

If you want to become a client-centered law firm, you first need to consider the following phases of your client's legal journey.

Experiencing a legal problem as a client can be incredibly challenging and stressful. At first, there's often a sense of confusion and uncertainty as clients try to navigate unfamiliar legal processes and terminology. The anxiety and apprehension only grow as they ponder the potential consequences and implications of their situation.

Adding to their worries are the financial burden of legal fees and the fear of drawn-out legal battles. Ultimately, facing a legal problem takes a toll on their emotions, requiring resilience, support and expert guidance to find a resolution.

Finding and then consulting with and retaining attorneys can be overwhelming, too. Attorney consultation meetings can be intimidating for potential clients due to the complex and often unfamiliar nature of legal matters. Emotions run high in many cases, making it difficult for clients to discuss their problems openly. The fear of judgment — both for their legal situation and their lack of legal knowledge — can be paralyzing. Financial concerns and uncertainty about the legal process add to the stress, and clients may be reluctant to share sensitive information with someone they've just met.

Ultimately, the attorney-client relationship is meant to provide support, expert guidance and the unwavering assurance that the client's interests are being tenaciously represented. Through this journey, clients experience a range of emotions, from excited anticipation to overwhelming relief, as the case progressively moves toward its rightful resolution.

Although you can improve the client's experience when facing a legal problem, you can make significant improvements in the phases that follow. As you consider each phase, take time to reflect on how you can make them better for your client. For example, when a client discovers your website, does its layout and design make it easy for them to locate your contact information? Is there a live chat app that can quickly answer any pressing questions a potential client might have? When it comes to enhancing the client experience, every detail counts.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTING CLIENT-CENTRIC LAW FIRM MANAGEMENT

Whether a law firm is large or small, certain imperatives are shared. While keeping the business afloat is crucial, meeting client expectations and delivering exceptional customer service are equally important. These must-haves are fundamental to your firm's success and your overall experience.

Regularly Communicate

Effective communication is key to tailoring services. Law firms should maintain open and regular communication with their clients by providing clients with timely updates on their cases, legal developments that may impact them, and any potential risks or opportunities.

Understand Risk Tolerance

Different clients have varying risk tolerances. Some may be risk-averse and prefer conservative legal strategies, while others may be more willing to take calculated risks to achieve their objectives. Law firms should discuss and align their legal approach with the client's risk tolerance so the client feels comfortable with the chosen strategy.

Provide Educational Resources

Clients often appreciate law firms that empower them with knowledge. Offer educational resources, workshops or training sessions related to legal matters that are relevant to the client's industry or needs.

Leverage Technology

Integrate technology to streamline processes and enhance the client experience. Client portals, secure document sharing, e-signature platforms and case management systems can improve communication, accessibility and efficiency.

Seek Feedback and Adapt

Actively solicit feedback from clients about their experiences with the firm's services. Use surveys, client interviews or feedback forms to collect valuable insights. Law firms should be willing to adapt and make improvements based on this feedback, demonstrating their commitment to continuous improvement and client satisfaction.

Anticipate Future Needs

Effective service tailoring doesn't stop with the immediate legal issue at hand. Forward-thinking law firms anticipate their client's future needs and proactively offer solutions and advice to help them navigate potential challenges or opportunities.

BECOMING AN ESTABLISHED CLIENT-CENTRIC PRACTICE

When done right, a client-focused approach to law firm management can go a long way toward ensuring client satisfaction. By understanding each individual's needs and proactively anticipating their concerns, firms can provide an unparalleled level of service that will keep clients coming back time and again. In today's highly competitive legal industry, there is no better way to stand out from the crowd than by providing a truly client-centric experience.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeffrey M. Kimmel is the Managing Partner and Chief Executive Officer of Salenger, Sack, Kimmel, and Bavaro LLP, a personal injury law firms in New York. Kimmel is identified as a business leader and true agent of change in the legal field and has used his business background to cultivate a dynamic law firm known for being a client-oriented business that supports and promotes lawyer development, firm efficiency processes, case value maximization protocols, staffing diversity and community outreach programs. Along with running a successful law firm, Kimmel is also the author of *What Lawyers Don't Know: How to Run a Business and Start Loving Life* and an expert legal source for CNN, ABC, NBC and CBS.

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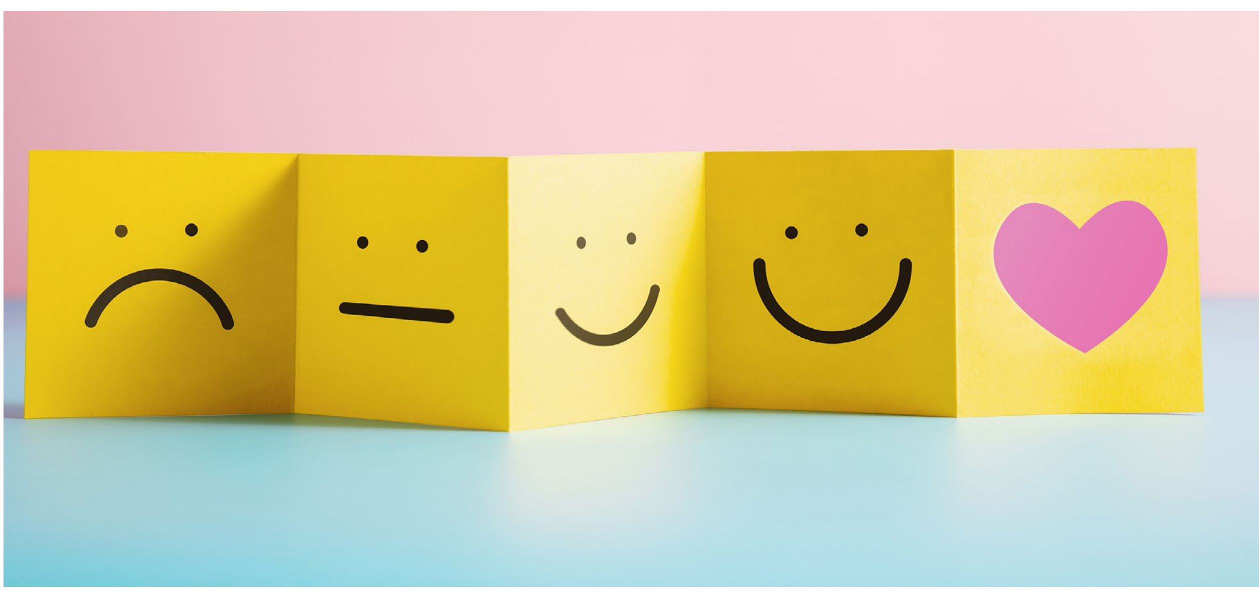

KARI MEILLAT

Compensation Services Manager KMA Human Resources Consulting

How Pay Transparency Laws Can Help Your Recruitment Process

Employee compensation used to be guarded information that was not readily shared outside of the human resources department or an employee's direct supervisor. Over the past few years, that mindset has shifted, and it has become more common for compensation and salary ranges for a particular job to be made publicly available to employees or job applicants.

Pay transparency has been gaining momentum and is considered a step towards pay equity and reducing gender and racial pay gaps. Many states and municipalities currently have some form of salary transparency law, with more likely to be passing pay transparency legislation in the near future. In fact, it's illegal in many locations for employers to prohibit employees from discussing their pay or asking about the pay of others. Employees may also have protections under federal law. Multistate employers will need to stay current on the laws that differ among the states/municipalities, including job posting and applicant and employee communication requirements.

As the growth of pay transparency continues, it's important that businesses and HR professionals understand the benefits and important considerations surrounding pay transparency and how to navigate this new territory of communicating employee compensation.

> "Providing more information about salary structures and compensation helps employees better understand their pay and benefits packages and can lead to more trust between employee and employer — which in turn can increase retention."

IMPROVE EMPLOYEE RETENTION AND RECRUITMENT

By providing employees with more information about their pay and how it is determined, pay transparency laws can help address wage disparities and promote fairness and equality in the workplace. This is considered a core value prioritized by many workers today. Providing more information about salary structures and compensation helps employees better understand their pay and benefits packages and can lead to more trust between employee and employer — which in turn can increase retention.

On the recruitment side, pay transparency in job postings can help to increase the number of applicants. The reality is that many job seekers are unwilling to apply for a position that does not indicate a salary range. When a salary range is posted along with the open position, candidates will also know up front if the pay is in line with their expectations, saving both the employer's and candidate's time.

ENCOURAGE SMARTER COMPENSATION PLANNING

For most businesses, employee compensation is the biggest budget item. And despite best intentions, developing a concrete plan to increase this expense is a challenge.

The introduction of pay transparency laws encourages businesses to develop a competitive compensation strategy that defines different salary ranges, eliminates inequalities and incentivizes behaviors that drive success. This can give a company, and the HR department, clarity when making salary and benefit decisions and help to ensure that salaries align with market-based wages. This benefits talent acquisition and staffing, which supports organizational success.

SUPPORT AN OPEN DIALOGUE ABOUT COMPENSATION

Today's expectations around compensation have changed considerably, and it's not uncommon for employees to talk openly about salary with their colleagues or to monitor the salary ranges of others in similar roles at other companies. Employees want to better understand their own pay and how it compares to their peers. In a tight labor market, the lack of this information can lead an employee to seek other employment opportunities or expend less effort at work if they don't feel they are being adequately compensated.

With the growth of the pay transparency initiative, it's important that businesses develop a clear plan to prepare for changing laws and to maintain a competitive advantage.

Here are a couple actions you can take to address pay transparency.

- **Establish competitive salary ranges:** A good first step is to establish salary ranges that are competitive for your organization's size, industry and location. Understanding the market rate of pay for your jobs will provide the data to develop your salary ranges.
- **Define your compensation strategy:** It will also be important to define your compensation strategy to provide clarity when making salary and benefits decisions. Consider how you will align to the market, the types of compensation you will offer, and how you will communicate to applicants and employees. Ideally your compensation strategy aligns your budget with talent needs to drive organizational success.

Taking steps now to set and establish salary ranges and to define compensation strategy can go a long way in helping a business navigate this new territory.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kari Meillat is a Compensation Services Manager with KMA Human Resources Consulting. From internal compensation professional to an independent compensation consultant, Meillat has more than a decade of experience in compensation and data analytics.

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Avoid Tax Surprises by Forecasting Cash Flow

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When the partners get their monthly financial packet, there's one thing everyone wants to see: a high bank balance. But that can be a dangerous thing. A big number in the operating account is a recipe for temptation, especially if it leaps up due to a large cash settlement or referral fee. It can make partners expect an outsized distribution.

Instead, that money may be needed to pay operating expenses or build up cash reserves. On top of any upcoming projects, as much as 40% of your net income needs to be set aside and distributed quarterly for partner tax payments to avoid getting hit with a hefty bill (and penalties) come April.

If partners misinterpret a high bank balance and take too large of a draw, there are a number of potential consequences. For example, they might need to finance upcoming expenses with their line of credit, skip a future distribution or be asked to put money back into the firm — none of which are desirable scenarios to say the least.

So how do you ensure that everyone is on the same page when it comes to cash?

> "The power of the partners' financial report will depend on its real-time relevancy. A December 15 report that discusses October's or November's numbers is less impactful than one that explains what happened last week."

PROVIDE INSIGHT INTO WORKING CAPITAL

Start with good communication to help partners understand the firm's operating account (for payroll and vendor bills) and cash reserves. Together, these accounts are considered working capital, but we highly recommend setting up two separate accounts, so that the numbers can speak clearly.

Your cash reserves account is where you build up 10% to 30% of annual revenue — $1.2 to $3.6 million for a $12-million firm. You'll want to choose where you are on that spectrum based on several firm characteristics. Firms with greater risk, higher client concentration, lower recurring revenue and major plans for growth will tend towards the higher end of that range. However, there is no set formula, and a firm could choose to shift that number up or down for any number of reasons.

As your firm dials in its strategy, make sure partners understand the decision to hold onto cash — especially if it's a larger amount than they're used to seeing.

Reasons to hold onto (more) cash include:

- Major upcoming investments (new technology, office space, etc.)
- The firm is in high-growth mode (increase in annual revenue = increase in cash reserve balance)
- Loss or scope-reduction of major clients
- A high percentage of revenue comes from a single client (10% of revenue or more)
- A weak pipeline of new business
- Partner tax distributions (as much as 40% of net income)

RECONCILE WEEKLY

The power of the partners' financial report will depend on its real-time relevancy. A December 15 report that discusses October's or November's numbers is less impactful than one that explains what happened last week.

Although some finance professionals still believe they need a bank statement for reconciliation, it's just not true anymore. Checking receipts and disbursements online every week takes relatively little time and, ultimately, simplifies end-of-month closings. As long as the firm's billers are filling out timesheets daily — a best practice that unfortunately isn't always followed — the weekly balance sheet should be accurate enough to be useful.

This gives you the basis for a dynamic rolling forecast of your cash position: Every week, you can look at charge hour pacing, and change your expectation based on what people are actually charging. You can look at cash receipts, manage cash disbursements and update the dynamic forecast to determine what you expect your cash to be over the next 12 weeks on a rolling basis.

This to-the-minute detail can help bring partners into the conversation around cash. It's easier to see distributions as part of a bigger-picture strategy when everyone can understand the direction the firm is headed, what needs to be done to get there and where improvements need to be made along the way.

ACCURATELY FORECAST TAXES

Taxes can be a firm's largest single expense. No one wants to miss estimates and get hit with penalties. Nor does anyone want to have to take out a loan to cover a shortfall.

If you're doing a rolling forecast of your cash position, you can also forecast net income. With that information, you'll know if income is rising, flat or declining, which will allow you to decide what to distribute on a quarterly basis to cover the owners' taxes. If income is rising, the safe harbor approach allows you to pay 110% of the previous year's bill in estimates, without penalty. If income is flat or declining, you can pay 90% of the previous year's bill.

As you approach year end, you'll also be aware of how much additional tax you might expect to pay in April or — if this year wasn't as strong as last year — how much of a refund partners might expect to receive.

CONFIDENTLY DISTRIBUTE THE REMAINING CASH

It's common for partners to see a high bank balance and think that money is available for distribution, skipping crucial questions that can lead to a crisis come tax time.

However, if you create a real-time forecast that allows you to set aside the right amount for overhead, cash reserves and estimated quarterly taxes, you can be confident that the remaining cash balance sitting in the operating account is available for distribution.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John C. Scott, CPA, AEP, is a Partner in Tax at Anders CPA + Advisors. With more than 30 years of experience, Scott leads the firm's legal industry efforts as a Virtual Chief Financial Officer. He offers dedicated resources, financial insight and critical thinking to address complex issues facing law firms, helping them be more efficient, competitive and profitable. Scott is an Accredited Estate Planner, Chartered Global Management Accountant and a Certified Public Accountant.

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Is It Time for a Technology Health Exam at Your Firm?

Companies have made substantial technology investments over the past two decades as they focus on digital transformation. But now, rising cloud costs have become a pain point for legal businesses. To tackle runaway cloud spending, firms must find and address inefficiencies in their deployments.

Many firms started moving to cloud-based data storage, because it's easier and usually cheaper than keeping files on physical servers or in file cabinets. As more clients and files accumulate, a firm doesn't need to create extra office space or digital storage capacity. And with cloud computing, multiple lawyers can collaborate efficiently by adding comments simultaneously on documents. According to the LawPay & MyCase 2022 Legal Industry Report, 81% of law firms use cloud-based software.

But there's much more to tech expenses than the cloud. Whether your law firm is looking to reduce its cloud costs and/or other tech-related outlays, leaders can learn actionable solutions for managing and optimizing technology health and costs. That way they can maximize the efficiency of the enterprise's entire tech stack — and deliver measurable value to the bottom line.

> "Technology performance impacts everything from attorney productivity to client service levels. Even minor degraded performance or intermittent slowdowns can negatively affect firm operations and bottom lines."

DETERMINING TECHNOLOGY HEALTH

Ensuring the stability, reliability and predictability of applications and systems is critical for law firms. Technology performance impacts everything from attorney productivity to client service levels. Even minor degraded performance or intermittent slowdowns can negatively affect firm operations and bottom lines.

However, optimizing the health and efficiency of the underlying technology is complex. Comprehensive workload analysis requires tracking numerous technical and financial metrics over time across the hundreds or thousands of servers and applications. This level of sophistication often exceeds the capabilities of legal IT teams and without expertise in workload analytics, firms cannot derive the full benefits.

Bridging these information and skill gaps is key for law firms to keep pace with the increasing data and business growth. Workload optimization enables legal IT teams to find and gain efficiencies by analyzing the critical workload metrics and mapping them to strategic recommendations required to boost the application performance. By focusing on workload analytics, firms can:

- Identify performance bottlenecks that impact productivity.
- Right-size servers and resources to improve efficiency.
- Consolidate redundant or underutilized tools to reduce costs.
- Identify usage trends to optimize licensing models.
- Determine infrastructure upgrades providing the best ROI.
- Implement data lifecycle management to optimize costs.

BRINGING FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY TO YOUR TECHNOLOGY SERVICES

Law firms as well as companies across all industries will struggle to control tech costs until they get a handle on the total cost of ownership (TCO). In IT, TCO can include the acquisition of hardware and software, implementation, licenses, management, maintenance, support, training, end-user expenses, etc.

It's my belief that technology leaders today don't fully comprehend the TCO of all the different technology platforms they're migrating or purchasing, especially when they go to a utility — or pay-for-what-you-use — model, which is how they pay for computing, or software, in the cloud. Conventional wisdom dictates, "You have to be in the cloud," but then there is sticker shock once you get there because most applications were written 10 years ago and were not designed with efficiency in mind. This is like buying a new energy-efficient house but then putting in 1960s appliances.

The choices we make for our enterprise applications in terms of design, coding, processes and data modeling all have lasting impacts on the bottom line, both from a resource perspective, but more importantly on the financials and margins. For example, inefficient code created today will cost more in support and maintenance down the road, independent of the resource cost. Inefficiency has a price, and unfortunately, this price is often overlooked when calculating tech costs.

The challenge today in tech is the lack of transparency into cloud costs. Cloud bills provide only high-level data that lags actual usage by 30 days and often leverages made up cost units. This prevents detailed analysis of spending drivers and what is actually driving the costs. At best, cloud providers break down costs by resource or server, which is a great start but leaves organizations with more questions. This gap limits your firm's chief financial officer's (CFO) ability to optimize cloud investments.

For example, our analysis has shown that the top 1% of processes within a database consume on average over 50% of total cost. Without granular insights, firms cannot identify and address these biggest cost culprits. Instead, legal and most IT departments make changes based on guesswork, not data-driven insights. Firms overpay for unused capacities and underutilized tools and continue to support redundant systems and processes.

Having financial transparency into the cost of your technology systems means knowing three things: the cost of the technology, the value of the technology, and the cost "takeouts" or costs of efficiency improvements that could be reduced or eliminated. Companies need transparency into the true costs of applications, code and data to understand the true costs of their systems. That can only occur by forging and strengthening partnerships between technology and the CFO's office.

And to optimize the costs of technology, you need to understand not only the costs you're incurring today but also how these costs will compound over time. It's not just making the technological changes but also proving and recognizing their business value that is missing from the way things are done today.

The truth is few organizations know for sure how healthy and what the capacity of their technology environment is today and how much it will be able to support tomorrow. All they know is what they see in the large quantities of data being collected as applications and databases process more and more business transactions and data every day.

Understanding workload analytics and identifying inefficiencies within your technology platforms can save enterprises millions of dollars. These savings can then be reallocated back to the business and used to find ways to deliver more value.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ben DeBow is a business leader, author and innovator on a mission to move the technology industry from the era of abundance to the era of efficiency. As the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Fortified, a database consultancy twice named to the *Inc.* 5000 list of fastest-growing private companies, DeBow has been implementing mission-critical data platforms around the globe for the past two decades. He is the author of *End of Abundance in Tech: How IT Leaders Can Find Efficiencies to Drive Business Value* and a sought-after speaker, podcaster and contributor to technology publications and media. He earned his degree in information systems and accounting from the University of Cincinnati.

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Anniversaries, Awards and Appointments

Members on the Move

Bryan Charles Bagnetto, a member of the New Orleans Chapter, is now Office Administrator at Taggart Morton, LLC, in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Gina Ciaccio, a member of the Chicago Chapter, is now Onboarding and Integration Manager at Benesch Friedlander Coplan & Aronoff LLP in Chicago, Illinois.

Andrea L. Myers, CLM, a member of the West Michigan Chapter, is now Director of Finance at Rhoades McKee PC in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

What's Happening at Headquarters

Start Planning Your Calendar for Annual Conference

Your travel and room arrangements are made. Now comes the fun part: Planning your education and networking calendar at our 2024 Annual Conference & Expo, taking place **May 19–22** in Aurora, Colorado!

You can download the newly released conference agenda featuring all the sessions and speakers you won't want to miss. Visit *alaannualconf.org* to learn more.

See you there!

P.S. If you haven't done so, make your hotel arrangements before space runs out.

Invest in Your Professional Growth: Apply for the CLM Exam This Spring

TIf you're interested in getting your CLM certification, now's the time! The deadline to apply for the spring exam is **March 7**.

If you have long wondered about the process to apply, we've got you covered. ALA is hosting a FREE webinar to go over everything you need to know. Sign up at *alanet.org/webinars* to join on **February 23** at **noon Central**. Plus, check out the recent *LM Extra* that provides even more information about how to start your CLM journey: *alanet.org/legal-management/lm-extras/is-2024-your-year-to-take-the-clm-exam.*

Did You Know? Members Receive Discounts from National Purchasing Partners

ALA has partnered with National Purchasing Partners (NPP) to offer member discounts for business solutions ranging from software to travel to internet services. For example, you can save up to 35% and get free shipping on HP tech products. Plus, save up to 25% on select hotels with Priceline travel deals. Go to *alanet.org/member-discounts* to learn more about NPP's offerings and register your firm.

Learn About the Basics of Running a Chapter

Registration for the 2024 Essentials of Chapter Leadership (ECL) is now open! This three-day virtual training event will take place **Tuesday, March 26** through **Thursday, March 28**.

This doesn't take the place of our popular Chapter Leadership Institute. That will be happening this summer. Rather, ECL is intended to provide incoming chapter leaders with the tools and knowledge necessary for chapter management, highlight important resources available to all leaders and present information on the importance of adhering to essential financial and legal responsibilities.

As event registration is on a per chapter basis, this is a great opportunity for *all* chapter leaders as well as prospective leaders to be provided with this training.

Register Now for ALA's February Virtual Events

Be sure to check out ALA's virtual events this month, where you can collaborate with fellow ALA members and learn from expert speakers. Don't miss out — register today!

- **ALA Roundtable: Redefining Legal Secretary/Paralegal Roles, February 16 at noon Central:** As the roles of legal secretary and paralegal have evolved, we have seen the need for adapting to technological advancements, incorporating specialized skills and shifting toward a more collaborative and strategic support staff team contribution.
- **Chapter Leader Educational Series Roundtable: Succession Planning/Officer Transitions, February 21 at noon Central**
- **Webinar: Monetize Your Professional Legal Knowledge for New Revenue Streams, February 21 at 2 p.m. Central:** In this webinar, you'll walk through a step-by-step process to create a business plan and execute it in order to monetize your skills and knowledge in the legal profession.

Visit the web version of this article at *alanet.org/legal-management/2024/february/ala-now/at-ala* for direct links to register to any of these events!