

LEGAL MANAGEMENT

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Let's Make a Deal

Law firms are in the driver's seat at lease renewal time.





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“
The even better news is that
no matter how fulfilling,
empty or painful your story
might be, it has the power
to positively impact others
and the world.”

What Is Your Story? Answering This Question Can Help Find Your Authentic Self

For the coming months, members of ALA’s volunteer leadership will be taking turns writing the Executive Director’s Big Ideas column. We hope you enjoy the fresh perspectives they’ll be sharing.

When I meet people, at some point in the conversation I often ask, “What is your story?” Some people are eager to share a brief introduction of who they are. Others are reserved and private. Often I hear some version of a well-rehearsed elevator speech. They are marketing snippets of sorts that aim to direct my attention to their most desirable characteristics. These are generally good enough to facilitate the interaction.

Occasionally, however, I encounter someone who is on a mission to share their vision of the world with anyone who will listen. These interactions are usually compelling and offer insight into the person at a higher level. During these encounters, my interest is piqued. Somehow, they have connected with their passion for something greater than themselves. They know their story. They are traversing their path. I am enticed to follow.

Many people do not think they have an interesting story. Some, like me, even struggle to think about theirs. But I’ve learned your story is the life experience and context that makes you who you are today. The trials, celebrations, relationships, experiences, lessons, cultures, societies, successes, failures and situations all inform your identity. Your story brings the color and meaning to the facts of your life.

The good news is that your story is not yet fully written — you can change its trajectory. The even better news is that no matter how fulfilling, empty or painful your story might be, it has the power to positively impact others and the world. Discovering meaning in

your story can provide the foundation for your purpose and be a steadying force in times of change and uncertainty. It is the primary source for finding your voice and for discovering your true self — and that's the foundation of authentic leadership. Your story provides the unique context for your ambition, performance and motivation and is one of the superpowers of leadership you can access.

AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP

The *Harvard Business Review* noted that authentic leaders in the workplace produce a more positive work environment, higher levels of productivity and trust and build better firm culture. Authenticity is directly related to self-efficacy. Your story provides the context for your current level of efficacy and self-efficacy. Efficacy refers to your *ability* to produce a result. Self-efficacy refers to your *belief* in your ability to produce a desired result or succeed in a situation. Former Stanford University professor Albert Bandura found that self-efficacy informs how people think, feel, behave, set goals and are motivated.

There are some helpful things you can do to increase your self-efficacy and to help others increase theirs. Discovering yourself or increasing self-awareness is the first step. Identify your strengths and weaknesses in different contexts and analyze how they relate to your identity and context. Why do you do or say the things you do and say? Do your actions produce the desired results? What patterns do you have that produce negative outcomes? These situations are clues to your blind spots.

One essential element of progressive self-awareness is a growth mindset — the belief that there is the need and the ability to improve. This is different than negative self-talk, which can be destructive and is based on a lack of belief in the ability to improve. Discard negative self-talk in favor of constructive self-talk. Learn to desire constructive input from others. Seek out those who will not simply tell you what they think you want to

hear or flatter you, but who will provide useful feedback related to things you did well and things you can do better and help you identify your blind spots. Find the nugget of truth from criticism even when it is not properly delivered or not comprehensively correct. Be a resource in this manner for others to build their self-efficacy.

Another area of self-awareness is understanding your own output. How you respond to another person's behavior or communication is informed by your subjective interpretation of interaction and pressured by emotions evoked from previous experiences. Reassess your own critical judgments by taking an inquisitive approach rather than a critical judgment approach to situations and the actions and communications of others.

You have likely heard the expression that success begets success. In the context of self-efficacy, success builds resilience when rehearsed. Celebrating successes and finding positive affirmations can improve your self-belief and sense of personal efficacy. Failures can be fruitful learning experiences when self-belief is fortified by success. Celebrating the success of others is a leadership skill that you can use to strengthen others' self-efficacy.

Practicing these skills helps to gain better perspective and empathy. Observing others who seem to have a high level of self-efficacy or who are in tune with their story can help you envision your own success story. By modeling these sometimes-difficult processes, you can help others become more effective and authentic.

Taking these steps to become the best version of yourself will yield significant results and change the trajectory of your leadership story. And, you just might have a different answer the next time someone asks you to tell them your story.

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ALANet's 2022 Benchmarking Survey reports on topics ranging from virtual work to firm structure to productivity. It provides important metrics on: practice areas, number of attorneys, billing/hourly rates, outsourcing, office space, support needs and more to help maintain a current and ongoing understanding of the industry's landscape.

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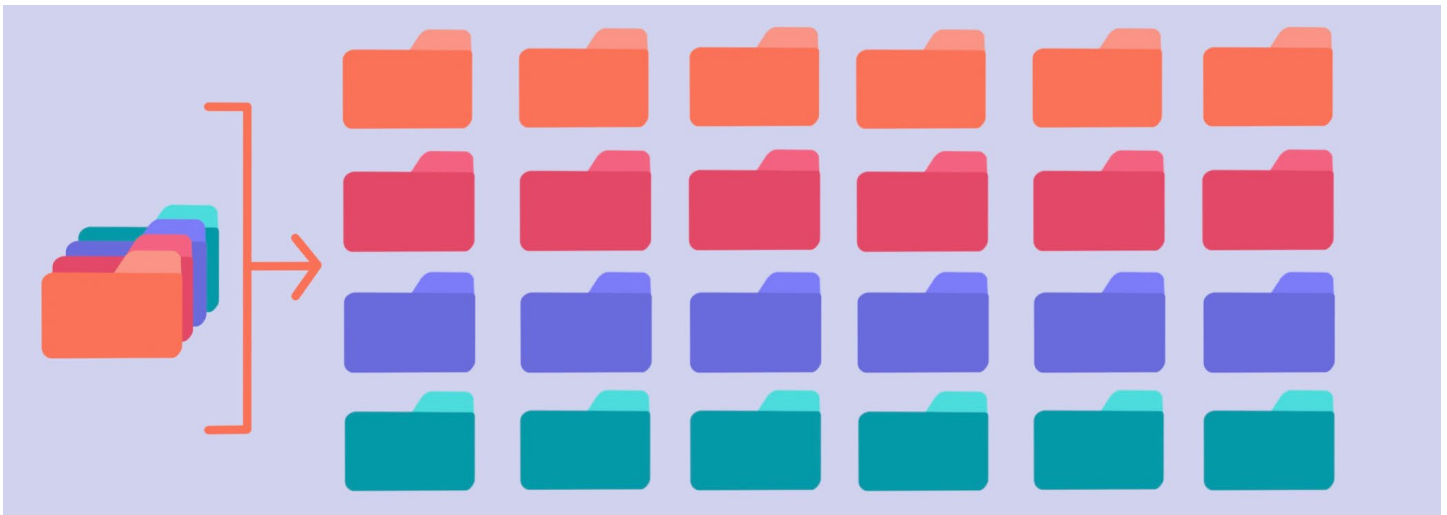


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Keeping Score: Why Legal Organizations Should Develop a Risk Scorecard

The business of running a law firm or corporate legal department has many challenges, but in an environment where cyber threats run rampant and the regulatory landscape is seemingly evolving by the day, managing the risk around sensitive information has to rank as a top priority.

This begs the question: How can a legal organization determine how prepared they are for this weighty task? Is there a way to benchmark their information security risk profile against industry standards and best practices to get a sense of overall systemic risk?

Legal organizations can start to wrap their arms around this challenge through the development of a risk scorecard that allows them to evaluate themselves in four keys areas:

1. Adoption and usage of an information management product like a document management system (DMS)
2. Categorization of content and application of security policies
3. Examination of ancillary information management systems
4. Ongoing content maintenance and records management

START WITH CENTRALIZATION AND CATEGORIZATION

A DMS is a useful central repository for managing sensitive and privileged content — but only if people actually use it.

Quite often, firms and corporate legal departments find that adoption of a DMS throughout the organization is somewhat patchy, with some departments or users

“The final critical area for the information management risk scorecard is to assess whether you are archiving or purging content that is no longer relevant as you continue to file information into the DMS.”

actively using it and others barely at all. This inconsistent usage presents a security risk because the DMS offers layers of governance and security that other storage options — such as local drives, network drives and Outlook folders — do not.

To benchmark risk around information management, firms should determine if there is active adoption of the DMS, with a goal of having at least 80% of the organization consistently using it. Additionally, they should ensure professionals are using the DMS to file emails as well as documents. After all, sensitive information comes in many forms.

After this foundational first step, the next step in managing risk involves categorizing the content in the DMS so that it can successfully be protected.

Classifying and securing data appropriately — for example, does it contain personally identifiable information or protected health information? — helps legal organizations navigate the challenges of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and other emerging data protection and privacy regulations to ensure compliance with any relevant laws. It's also necessary for effective implementation of need-to-know security, which can lock down information by project, office or department. For instance, maybe only a certain team needs access to a particularly sensitive set of files rather than the whole organization.

The goal here is to maximize the amount of information that is categorized and has appropriate security policies in place, and then to perform regular benchmarking on an ongoing basis to ensure the same is done to new content. In other words, this is not a “one and done” task.

DON'T FORGET ANCILLARY SYSTEMS AND ONGOING MAINTENANCE

After centralization and categorization have been addressed, legal organizations should turn their attention to other areas where systemic risk lurks — like ancillary systems.

While a DMS might serve as a central hub, it's only one part of a larger content ecosystem. The information stored in the DMS needs to be shared with internal and external collaborators via a web of other tools (think here of Slack, Microsoft Teams, third-party file sharing solutions and other mainstays of the modern workplace). It's important for security and governance policies to apply to content in those ancillary systems.

Are multiple copies of the same piece of content being stored in more than one system? To maintain security and avoid

running afoul of compliance and regulatory requirements, legal professionals should share links to secured and categorized content stored within the DMS, rather than uploading copies into multiple different places.

Again, this is not a “one and done” task: After addressing any vulnerabilities around existing ancillary systems, legal organizations need to ensure the same careful eye is applied to any new ancillary products that are deployed if they wish to minimize systemic risk.

The final critical area for the information management risk scorecard is to assess whether you are archiving or purging content that is no longer relevant as you continue to file information into the DMS. If not, end users are going to get overwhelmed with irrelevant content when they access the DMS, which makes them less likely to use it — which then creates risk for the organization.

Having a separate library for old content and an active library for frequently accessed content is a good way to make old knowledge accessible without compromising the search experience.

A word of caution here: While old or irrelevant information should be purged on a regular schedule in accordance with a clearly defined policy, there's certain content that needs to be kept and retained — for example, if a piece of content is declared as a record or has a legal hold placed on it in response to a subpoena. With a deliberate and mindful approach, legal organizations can successfully prune their content “garden” without inadvertently increasing their risk profile.

KNOW THE SCORE

By measuring their information security risk profile against these benchmarks and best practices, legal organizations can start to develop a risk scorecard to get a clear assessment of where they stand. In doing so, they will give themselves a powerful way to effectively address systemic risk across the organization. Simply put, knowing where you stand reduces risk.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aaron Rangel is a Director of Product Management at iManage. Rangel has extensive experience in launching innovative products to the marketplace. Prior to iManage, Rangel held senior product management positions at SPSS and IBM and has extensive experience with both the document management and analytics space.

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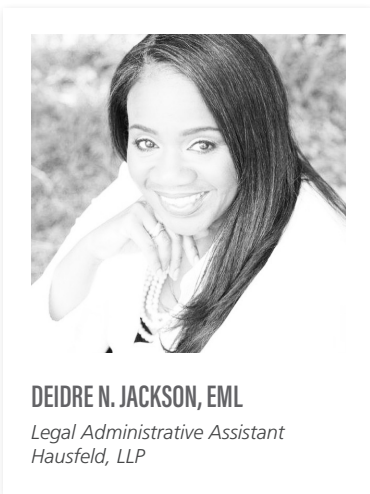
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DEIDRE N. JACKSON, EML
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“As organizations take meaningful steps toward diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, there exist opportunities for legal support staff to make an impact.”

Diversity Efforts Also Must Include Development for Legal Support Staff

The legal industry is booming. But it’s also an employee’s market, which means legal organizations — just like other industries — are struggling to hire. When looking to retain support staff — such as paralegals, administrative assistants and marketing professionals — firms should first lift up and learn from those within their own ranks.

The globalization of most practices coupled with advances in technology has increased the demand for talented professionals in legal support positions. In response to civil unrest, social injustice, economic downturn and the global health crisis, many firms are responding to industry standards and client expectations by increasing their diversification efforts. As organizations take meaningful steps toward diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, there exist opportunities for legal support staff to make an impact.

Here are three ways you can help ensure an inclusive community at your organization, while also elevating your company’s professional development.

1. USE THE MANSFIELD RULE

Creating more diversity has increasingly become a top priority among organizations worldwide, including in the legal industry. The national movement to increase diversity within law firms is known as the Mansfield Rule, named after Arabella Mansfield, the first female attorney in the United States. The Mansfield Rule requires law firms to demonstrate progress in recruitment and leadership and consider a minimum of 30% diverse candidates in lateral hiring, partner promotions, marketing and firm governance.



But building diversity goes beyond just hiring.

2. ENCOURAGE STAFF TO START OR JOIN AFFINITY GROUPS

Diversity brings underrepresented voices, thoughts and experiences to the forefront. One successful way to do this is through affinity groups — employee resource groups that share identity characteristics. These play an invaluable role in ensuring an inclusive environment where employees can come together and build connections based on shared interests. In fact, a report from 2021 contends that successful affinity groups are structured initiatives of inclusion that welcome all members of the organization. Active engagement of all members of the organization leads to higher productivity and performance.

Diversity, equity and inclusion is everyone’s responsibility. As the legal administrator, you play a key role. Your voice and skills add value in establishing networks, mentorship and other opportunities for professional and personal development.

3. REFER SUPPORT STAFF TO PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Encourage legal support staff to get involved in a professional organization that aligns with their career path. Think of everything ALA means to you and your professional growth. Membership in professional service organizations like ALA are a tremendous opportunity to network and to learn about and impact industry standards surrounding diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging. Membership in professional organizations better equips employees to contribute to initiatives. They’ll always be up to date on industry standards and best practices.

Those in support positions should know their contributions matter in the business of law. The key is to develop those knowledge, skills and abilities that allow you to make a viable contribution to the firm. The legal profession relies on support staff in a variety of roles. Recognize your influence and power. The academic, professional and volunteer experiences all contribute to the organization’s culture and movement to create and cultivate a diverse team of professionals. With the growing movement to be diverse and inclusive, organizations should encourage and welcome contributions and engagement from all members of their communities.



READ MORE ABOUT DIVERSE TALENT PATHWAYS

In the May issue of *Legal Management*, ALA member Chassidy C. Deckard, SHRM-SCP, outlined ways to attract diverse candidates to the business of law. Read the full column, and then be sure to check out ALA’s Committee on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility for more resources to guide your firm in this area: alanet.org/deia.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Deidre N. Jackson, EML, is a Legal Administrative Assistant with Hausfeld, LLP. An Independent member, she has served on ALA’s Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility Committee for two years. She was also a legal secretary for over 25 years. She’s a doctoral candidate and can be found writing her dissertation in between work, family and volunteering in the community.



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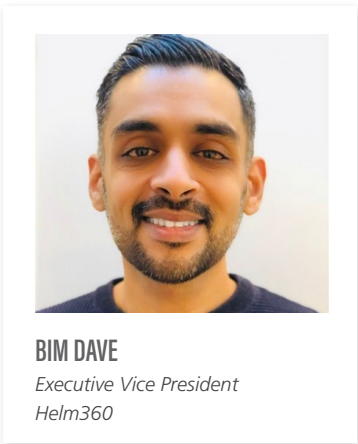
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Law Firm IT Customization: Approach at Your Own Risk

“You can fully customize this to suit your needs” is something law firm managing partners, innovation managers and IT directors often hear during legal tech vendor presentations.

On its face, being able to customize a product to meet the unique requirements of the firm seems like a good thing. In the real world, extensive customization can actually cause significant problems and may lead to unnecessary expenses or even client relationship nightmares.

Certain customizations, for example, can make updating software impossible and prevent firms from taking advantage of future developer improvements. Their version of the software will just be too different for the upgrades to function properly. In a future update, the developer might also offer a feature for free that the firm previously paid for as a customization.

In extreme cases, customizations can cause products such as accounting software to output incorrect information. Given that algorithms do these calculations in the background, that error might not be caught for months or years — causing financial chaos when it's finally noticed. That is a client disaster waiting to happen.

All of this can be costly to both find and reverse, which can negate any savings from implementing technology in the first place. Even minor customizations or forgotten upgrades can create a significant issue. If staff and attorneys are not making full use of expensive software add-ons that sounded great in the sales pitch, that means the firm has 1) paid for technology that was never needed in the first place, and 2) spent time training people on something irrelevant to their day-to-day work.

“Just like going to the grocery store with a list reduces impulsive snack buying, planning will keep everyone focused on what is truly needed from a solution.”

WHEN IT COMES TO CUSTOMIZATION, LESS IS REALLY MORE

Legal organizations should resist the temptation to customize their IT. The old adage that “less is more” really applies here.

Many problems can be avoided by simply having a solid implementation plan in place. This includes clearly documenting how the firm’s systems, processes and integrations look today and defining what a successful solution will look like. Just like going to the grocery store with a list reduces impulsive snack buying, planning will keep everyone focused on what is truly needed from a solution. Instead of being distracted by bright and shiny add-ons and persuasive sales pitches, the implementation teams will focus on what the solution actually needs to do for the firm.

In most cases, firms should use new technology as is for six months before even considering customization. During that time, attorneys, staff and IT personnel can assess whether they can live with the solution’s limitations or if customizations truly are needed. Often, the firm will find out it can easily make compromises for anything lacking. Even then, it is important to keep the focus on what the firm actually needs, rather than what some people think the software should do.

WHAT TO CHANGE AND WHAT TO LEAVE ALONE

If after six months a firm decides it must have certain customizations for an IT solution to be effective, it can explore making changes. There are, however, safer tweaks than others and some to avoid at all costs.

The following can likely be customized without any problems:

- Forms
- Workflows
- Reporting formats/how data is organized in reports
- Integration and synchronization between other IT systems in the firm

Firms should avoid customizations that change the core functionality of an IT product, especially those involving an algorithm or hidden automatic calculation. There is no way to peer into the “black box” of an algorithm to make sure its output is correct. It might take months or even years to spot a problem — and by then it is far too late.

Given this, anything involving a firm’s general ledger (accounting, financial reporting) or functions such as trust



calculations should be left alone. There is simply too much risk without any upside. What a firm can do is look at some of the safer customizations listed above to see if those changes will accomplish its goals instead of drastic alterations to core functionality.

APPROACH AT YOUR OWN RISK

Firms face serious liability if they succumb to the temptation to customize a new IT solution. From paying for unused features to incorrect accounting reports that ruin client relationships, the problems can be serious.

Reversing changes can be expensive, not to mention the opportunity cost if customizations prevent taking advantage of future developer upgrades — which may include free features that a firm once paid to have as a customization. When it comes to a law firm’s technology, it’s is much wiser and more cost-effective to have a solid implementation plan and approach customization with caution.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bim Dave is the Executive Vice President of Helm360. With 15+ years in the legal tech industry, Dave’s keen understanding of how law firms and lawyers use technology has propelled Helm360 to the industry’s forefront.

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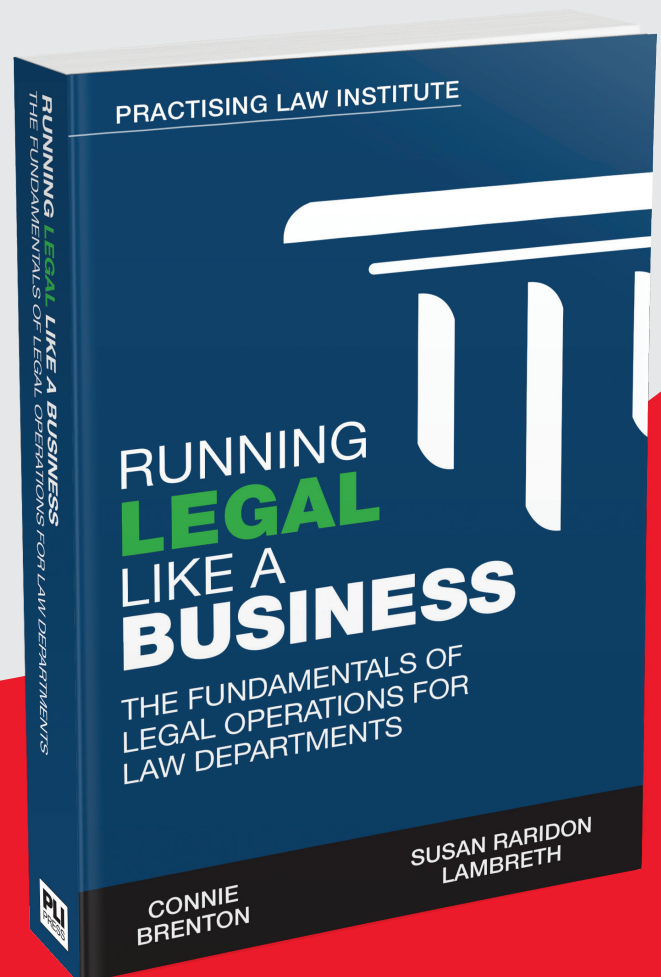
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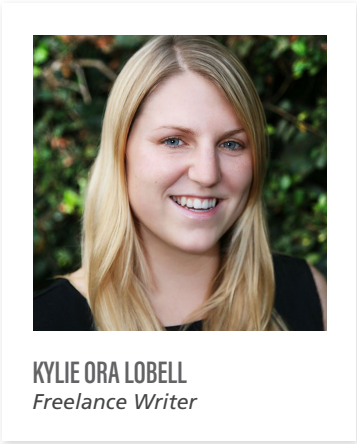
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KYLIE ORA LOBELL
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Fighting Change Fatigue

Change doesn't have to be tiresome or scary when it's done right.

Legal organizations and innovation are not typically linked. Firms in particular tend to follow a traditional mode and may not be open to change. Change often means following the path of least resistance — it's easier but not always the most fruitful choice. After the turbulent last two-plus years, normalcy and status quo can seem comforting.

However, switching up how they operate can be exactly the thing that propels legal organizations forward, impresses their clients and contributes to their overall success.

When you can change according to the times, you're going to be well prepared to assist your clients and provide outstanding service.

"Organizational change at law firms is critical for one reason: to better serve clients," says John Joy, a Managing Partner at FTI Law in New York. "In order for firms to offer the same level of service as clients have come to expect in other service industries, it is critical that law firms embrace change."

Richard J. Brandenstein, an attorney and Partner at Fusco, Brandenstein & Rada, P.C., agrees whole-heartedly. "Change in a law firm is necessary to ensure we are keeping up with the correct practices and are doing everything correctly and within the law," he says. "Change is inevitable, and it's what allows your business to grow and evolve."

While change is crucial, it's not always easy to implement. Given the rapid change everyone has experienced since 2020 in both their personal and professional lives, more changes can be a hard sell. Change fatigue is setting in.

"In over 25 years of managing law firms, I have yet to have an employee, attorney or staff [member] who likes change," says Missy Hirst, MSLA, Chief Operating Officer

“
In over 25 years of managing law firms, I have yet to have an employee, attorney or staff, who likes change. Change is hard. Change is unpleasant. Change is scary. Change is daunting. I get it.”

at Altitude Community Law; she is also a member of the Mile High Chapter. “Change is hard. Change is unpleasant. Change is scary. Change is daunting. I get it.”

Additionally, Hirst notes it can be an isolated road to travel.

“It can be lonely because we may be the only person in our workplace that sees the need for the change,” she says. “It can be long because buy-in from the top, consensus-building from the bottom up, budgeting negotiations and logistical planning take time. And it can be thankless because humans are busy marching forward and rarely look back to reflect on — and be thankful for — a beneficial change [that] was made.”

Here are some tips on implementing change in meaningful, effective ways at your firm without encouraging fatigue.

COMMUNICATE THE IMPORTANCE OF CHANGE

Partners need to buy into the change and work hand in hand with the administrators to move plans forward.

“Regardless of their stated title, legal management professionals oftentimes are in the position of being a change agent for their firm or organization, and this is typically understood to be part of the ‘other duties as assigned’ section of our job description,” says Hirst. “The reality is, we don’t have time for it in addition to the scope of our day-to-day responsibilities, so we have to make time for it in order to make change happen.”

When partners and administrators work together, they should involve everyone at the firm in their plans to be transparent.

“The best way to communicate the importance of change to employees is to be open and honest about changes,” says Brandenstein. “You want to explain why the changes are necessary, and then focus on how they will help improve the colleagues’ workday when they get used to these changes.”

Over at Farris, Riley & Pitt, LLP, attorney Anastasia Allmon Riley says her firm holds forums “to discuss the changes and [the] importance of them so that no one thinks that we’re making these changes on a whim or for no reason. We start with a forum and then follow up with an email that highlights the importance of these changes and the timeline that we’ll be implementing them.”

PAINT THE BIG PICTURE

The law firm’s stakeholders may tend to get caught up in their day-to-day tasks. They need to take a moment, step

back and see how the changes they’re implementing play into the bigger picture.

“Change fatigue happens when you feel as though you’re going nowhere, can’t get things off the ground or misidentify pushback as being insurmountable,” says Hirst. “None of that is usually true.”

Over the years, Hirst has made a number of changes by seeing the bigger picture and, together with her firm, deciding where they wanted to be a year from now, five years from now, etc.

“We never contemplate change just for change’s sake — there’s a reason, and usually a long-term reason, why the change is identified as being necessary now,” she says.

DON’T MIX UP TOO MANY THINGS AT ONCE

One change after another can lead to change fatigue. Instead of bombarding the firm, space out the changes.

“If there have been a lot of changes in a short space of time within a law firm, this is when change fatigue tends to sink in,” says Brandenstein. “It happens because employees are struggling to keep up with new processes, especially if there are a number of processes they need to alter and adjust in a short space of time.”



Allmon Riley echoes this sentiment: "Try not to change too much too often. If you need to implement changes, then you need to create a timeline for this instead of just overhauling things so that your employees can gradually adjust to the change."

Brandenstein suggests focusing on the most important changes first and working from there. "Once the significant changes have been made, and colleagues are comfortable with these changes, then you can implement smaller changes," he says.

CELEBRATE YOUR SUCCESSES

Trudging along and making change after change without stopping to reflect on your success will also lead to fatigue. Instead, make sure you take the time to celebrate when you are successful.

"Recognize the impact you have had as a change agent," says Hirst. "Job. Well. Done. You came, you saw, you spoke, you challenged, you planned, you executed. Change happened, and it was good. You are better than good; you are impactful. Own it!"

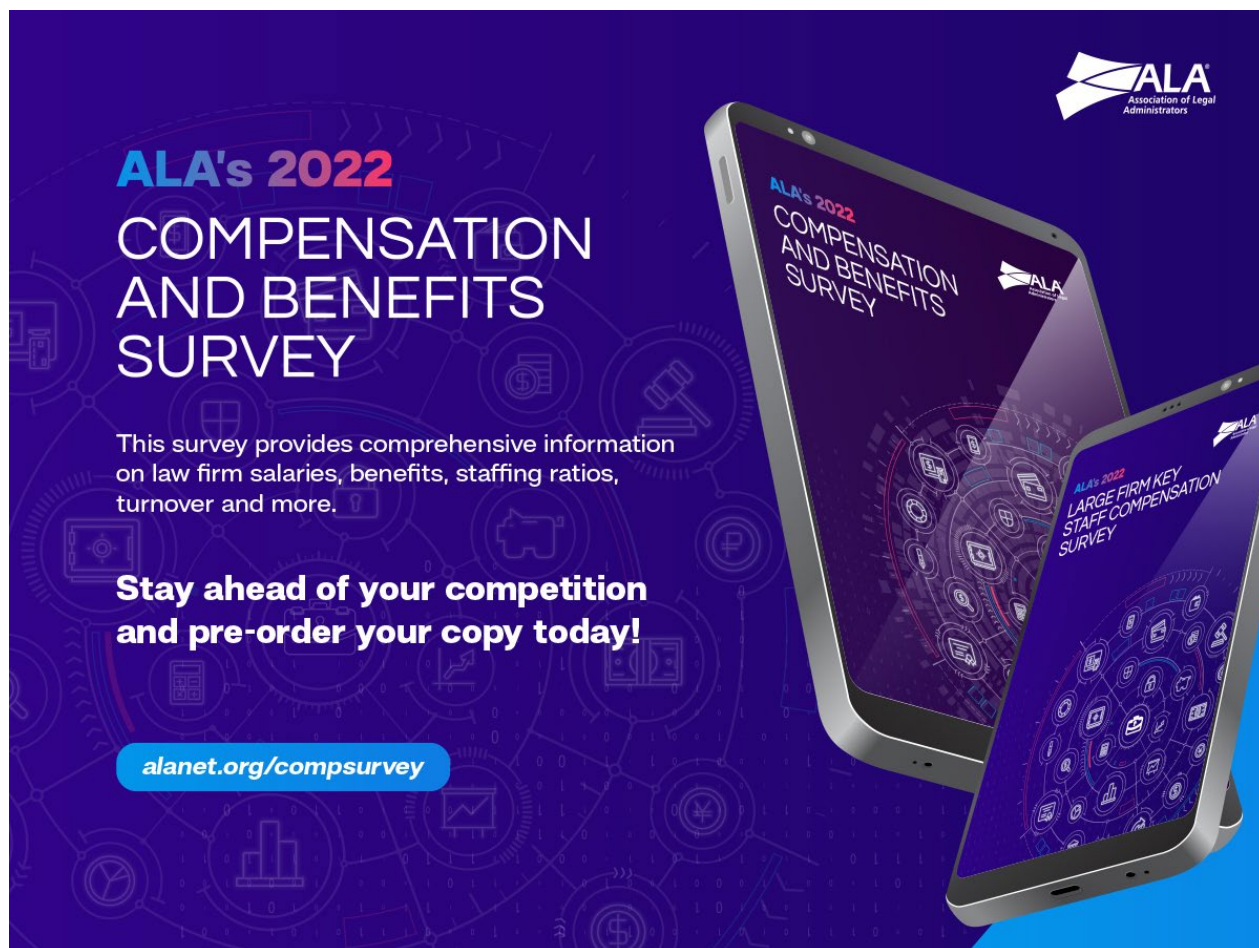
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kylie Ora Lobell is a freelance writer living in Los Angeles. She covers legal issues, blogs about content marketing, and reports on Jewish topics. She's been published in *Tablet Magazine*, *NewsCred*, *The Jewish Journal of Los Angeles* and *CMO.com*.

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Let's Make a Deal

Law firms are in the driver's seat at lease renewal time.

For law firms looking to renew their office leases, the outlook has never been sunnier. A pandemic-induced oversupply of commercial space has landed on the market at the same time professional organizations need less room to get their work done, thanks to the acceleration of hybrid work arrangements.



PHILLIP M. PERRY
Freelance Business Writer

“When negotiating a renewal, it’s important to build a sense of competition. What strikes fear into a landlord is the thought that you might move. Even in good times that is disastrous, but when vacancy rates are high losing a tenant is even more costly.”

“This is a difficult time to be an office space landlord in any major central business district,” says Ruth Colp-Haber, President and Chief Executive Officer of Wharton Property Advisors, a real estate consultancy in New York City. “There are several reasons. First, the demand has shrunk. Second, any landlord losing a tenant is going to be looking at space that could sit empty for a long time. Third, the landlord successful enough to find a new tenant will need to offer a better rate than the existing one and will also be hit with demands for a lot of construction to fill out the space.”

Colp-Haber, who has helped dozens of law firms find commercial space in her three-decade career, notes that the profession has been reporting only 40% office attendance rates in New York City. That’s actually a bit rosier (from the landlord’s perspective) than the same figure for other professions, thanks to a combination of inertia and conditions unique to the legal profession.

“Many older attorneys are requiring in-office activity,” she says. “Also, much legal work has to be done in-person, including meeting with clients and doing closings.”

It’s not just New York City. Other regions report similar gluts in working space. “The hybrid workspace is the biggest factor affecting the real estate market for law firms today,” says Allison Griffin Bittel, Senior Vice President and Principal in the Atlanta office of Colliers International. “People have figured out how to work from home and be productive. They are even looking at work flexibility and remote options when they consider whether to stay with their current firms or move to other employers.”

Did you know that becoming a Certified Legal Manager (CLM)[®] means you've shown mastery of the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) ALA has identified as paramount for managing a law firm — one of which is an understanding of lease/contract negotiations. Register by September 1 for the fall exam in November. Get full details at alanet.org/education/credentialing.

STEADY RATES

Ultimately, of course, the travails of landlords benefit tenants, who are in a better negotiating position than ever before. And real estate experts don't expect the situation to turn around any time soon.

"The market right now for leasing is amazing if you are a tenant," says Bill Himmelstein, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Tenant Advisory Group, based out of Chicago. "It will stay that way for the foreseeable future, and I'm talking several years minimum. Today even firms looking for 200,000 square feet are going to have a significant amount of opportunity."

Does the soft real estate market translate into better rental rates? Yes, although it might not seem so at first glance.

"The average quoted rents, the so-called 'face rates,' have actually increased slightly since the start of the pandemic," says Himmelstein. "Landlords are maintaining higher face rates because that is how their buildings are valued, which is important in the event they want to refinance or sell their property. Potential buyers or lenders look at future cash flows, apply a multiple and end up with the value of an office building." Not only must face rates remain elevated to support current valuations, but in some cases, rate reductions can result in violations of lending covenants.

In making their valuation calculations, banks ignore the amount of free rent or tenant improvement dollars landlords must give to attract desirable tenants. Those concessions, which are rising to impressive levels in the current soft market, essentially translate into lower rent.

"Very often tenants will get twice as much free rent and maybe 50% to 60% more tenant improvement dollars post-pandemic," says Himmelstein. "As a result, the net effective rates (those paid after such concessions) are between 20% and 30% lower than before. Securitization requirements such as cash and personal guarantees are also lower."

One reason banks ignore concessions is that they are considered one-offs that won't be repeated come renewal time. Perhaps some willful blindness is a factor as well because lenders are reluctant to repossess properties.

"The last thing banks want to do is become owners of hard assets like real estate," says Himmelstein. "Suppose they lend out on a valuation of \$400 million for a building and the landlord can no longer service the debt. If the bank gets the keys to the property, they might end up selling it for \$300 million, taking a 25% write off. Now the new buyer has a basis at \$300 million and can charge lower rent and offer better deals."

Despite the vested interest in high rental rates on the part of financial institutions, Himmelstein feels face rates will start to decline as costly concessions continue to threaten landlord profits and professional firms in all industries seek smaller spaces.

"As we get deeper into this pandemic, we're going to see more keys getting handed back to the banks who turn around and sell the properties at a much lower valuation," says Himmelstein. "That's where rental rates will start to reset. And we will start seeing this soon, I think."

Before that time arrives, law firms are looking to sublease to monetize their current larger-than-needed offices. "I've come up with an innovative sublease structure where I set up my own de facto coworking hubs, leasing sections of such large office spaces to smaller law firms," says Colp-Haber. "Both sides appreciate the one-year lease terms. The smaller ones don't have long-term liabilities, and the larger ones can get their space back if they need it."

BEING PROACTIVE

When the time comes to move to new quarters, high supply and low demand can only translate into a stronger negotiating position for law firms. Real estate experts point to several smart tactics to leverage a tenant's advantages. The first is to start early.

“If you go to your landlord one month, three months or even six months prior to your lease expiration, you have lost a tremendous amount of leverage,” says Himmelstein. “Your landlord will figure you don’t have enough time to negotiate terms and get new space built out before your current lease expires.”

Delays, while regrettable, are understandable. “Real estate is not top of mind for law firms and often they wait too long to engage in the market,” says Bittel. She cautions that disruptions in the supply chain as well as in permitting and construction can lengthen the time required to get from signing a deal to actually moving in. A year before the end of a current lease is not too early to start the ball rolling.

As for what to do in that year’s time? The overriding concern is to plant the seed with your landlord that the firm might relocate.

“When negotiating a renewal, it’s important to build a sense of competition,” says Himmelstein. “What strikes fear into a landlord is the thought that you might move. Even in good times that is disastrous, but when vacancy rates are high, losing a tenant is even more costly. The best way to negotiate the most aggressive renewal terms is to talk to other landlords and get competing offers.”

Bittel agrees that convincing a landlord of a pending move is essential to success. A real estate adviser can be an invaluable partner, making the right moves when speaking with a law firm’s current and potential landlords.

“The first thing is to partner with an occupier expert who understands market trends and who can advise on strategy,” says Bittel. “There are a lot of complexities post-pandemic, and you have to be creative in redesigning your space.”

THINK CONCESSIONS

As mentioned earlier, concessions are a way of life in the current leasing market. Law firms would do well to get a handle on the local market’s current allocations of free rent and build-out expenses. Plus, every lease has some type of escalation clause determining the formula for future operating cost increases. Negotiating favorable terms for billing — things such as electricity — can pay off.

“In the past, I used to always suggest direct operating expense increases,” says Colp-Haber. “Today, though, we are faced with the possibility of large increases down the road in the price of oil, building maintenance and labor. Perhaps a fixed annual increase would be better.”

“The market right now for leasing is amazing if you are a tenant. It will stay that way for the foreseeable future, and I’m talking several years minimum.”

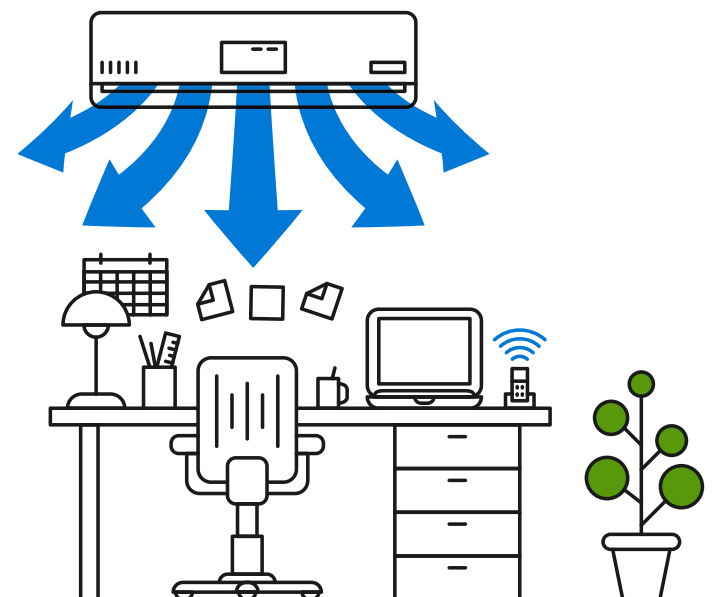
Prospective tenants should also determine the most favorable base year, designated in the lease as the rate floor from which future increases are calculated for property taxes, insurance and operating expenses. “You want to get the highest base rate you can so future increases are not as onerous,” says Colp-Haber.

Finally, the pandemic has brought home the benefits of preparing for disaster. “I always try to insert a clause that if the city goes into lockdown again, the firm will not have to pay for office space during that time,” adds Colp-Haber.

ENSURING A HEALTHY WORKPLACE

Speaking of the pandemic, the onslaught of COVID-19 (and the increased volatility of wildfires if you are out West) has ignited new concerns about air quality. At lease renewal time, law firms may want to assess the quality of their air cleaning systems in their current or prospective office quarters.

“The smart law firms are looking at ventilation systems and requesting upgrades,” says Himmelstein. “Larger firms of, say, at least 100,000 square feet can impact changes throughout their buildings. Smaller ones can take measures within their own space. A lot of attorneys are requesting that higher-grade filtration systems be part of a build out. And any new buildings are going to have much better ability to remove unwanted airborne diseases and germs.”



Leases may address the need for quality air and the steps that must be taken to provide and monitor a healthy operating environment. Real estate experts note that the expenses required to bring about a healthy workplace are more often borne by the landlord rather than the tenant.

LEASES FOR LONGER

Many law firms are pursuing shorter lease terms, given the uncertainty in the market. “Pre-pandemic we were commonly seeing 10- or 12-year lease terms for established law firms as they wanted to lay claim to the space they needed,” says Himmelstein. “Terms have come down to around seven or eight years. The decline is attributable to market uncertainty. We’re living in unprecedented times for this generation of managing partners. There is the continuing pandemic, supply chain issues, labor shortages, a war in Ukraine, historic inflation rates and rising interest rates. So law firms are erring on the side of caution by opting for shorter-term leases. No one wants to be trapped in a long-term lease when the next lockdown hits, ending up paying for space they can’t use.”

While there is a compelling case for shorter lease terms, longer contracts can work to the advantage of tenants, given the current soft market. “Established law firms with good handles on their growth trajectory will be better off signing longer-term leases,” says Himmelstein. “They will be able to get greater concessions, more aggressive face rates and better opportunities to reduce occupancy costs. The longer the lease, the better the terms. That’s what landlords want and that’s what often works better for tenants as well.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Phillip M. Perry is an award-winning business journalist with over 20 years of experience under his belt. A three-time recipient of the American Bar Association’s Edge Award for editorial achievement, Perry freelances out of his New York City office. His byline has appeared over 3,000 times in the nation’s business press.

 editorialcalendar.net



ARE YOU READY TO DEAL?

How prepared are you to land the best terms at lease renewal time? Find out by taking this quiz. Give yourself 10 points for each “Yes” answer. Then total your points to see how prepared you are.

1. Have you determined if your firm can reduce its space requirements, given the potential for maintaining or increasing hybrid work arrangements?
2. Are you starting your office space search at least a year before your current lease expires?
3. Have you considered securing the services of a real estate expert and done so if deemed desirable?
4. Are you seeking competing offers from landlords to help secure a better negotiating position?
5. Do you know the current square footage “face rates,” and vacancy rates, for commercial space in your locality?
6. Have you determined the concessions common to your locality, such as months of free rent and build-out expenses?
7. Do you know the escalation clause terms common to your locality?
8. Do you know what “base year” will be most favorable to you?
9. Have you considered a clause that will reduce or eliminate rent in the case of a regional lockdown?
10. Have you determined what length of lease will be optimal, given the state of the local market and your law firm’s business posture?

What’s your score? Over 80: You are ready to negotiate a favorable lease. Between 60 and 80: Time to fine-tune your position. Below 60: It’s a good idea to retool your plans by instituting ideas from the accompanying story.

On the Theme of Wellness ... Is This the Worst Workplace Threat to Your Health in the Stressful World of Firm Life?

Here's how to swiftly assess your risk of suffering a data breach and secure your firm's data once and for all ... alleviating the stress of cybersecurity anxiety.

'We Didn't Know What We Didn't Know' A Story of Hacker Carnage:

In November of 2018, David Eltringham's small law firm was hacked.

*"It was a big deal. We had to notify every single client and contact we've ever had in our DB that their private information had potentially been compromised. **You can't imagine the carnage that does to a small business like ours. Many of our clients went ballistic.**"*

*"We knew we needed something entirely different. **But what?**"*

*"**Our administrator doesn't have the time to become an IT security expert. And most big-name IT security solutions are too expensive for small firms like ours.**"*

*"**And here's the freaky thing:** When we heard all the protections we needed that we did NOT have...well, **we had never even heard of some of them!** Our liability would have been off the charts ... **gross negligence.**"*

This is why I say cybersecurity anxiety might be the biggest workplace threat to a legal administrator's health. If you doubt me, let's look at the ugliest causes of workplace stress ...

Number One: Excessive Workload? Check!

Over the course of a week, **we** small firm administrators could be overseeing *accounting, information technology, human resources, workflow management, facilities and more ... you name the hat, we have to wear it. Our* work is never done. **Our** to-do list is never completed. There is always a fire to stamp out.

And on top of all that we're supposed to be IT security experts as well? When?

Number Two: Lack of Control? Check!

While **we** administrators are RESPONSIBLE for IT security, we often lack the time, knowledge, decision making agency, or purchasing power to address it. **We** have little control, **but we will get blamed when the firm gets hacked!** That anxiety, apprehension and uncertainty hovers over **us** everyday. **We** know a ticking cybersecurity "time bomb" is present, just like at David's firm, but **we** don't have the time or control to diffuse it!

Assess Your IT Security Risks and LOCK Things Down Once and for All - It Might Be the Best Thing You Can Do for Your Mental and Physical Wellness

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Identify the most crucial cybersecurity metrics and how to improve your score to quickly reduce your risk of getting hacked.

Here's Some Advice from Small Firms Like Yours on Cybersecurity Peace of Mind ...



*"I did not believe any security service provider could cater to our situation. It's a great comfort knowing someone is watching out for us and that our data is protected. **I feel confident with BobaGuard.**"*

- Nancy Lanard, Plymouth Meeting, PA

*With BobaGuard I **sleep well at night** and don't worry about the things that used to keep me up.*

- David Eltringham, Boca Raton, FL



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- Galvin Kennedy, Houston, TX

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- Albert Thiel, Albuquerque, NM



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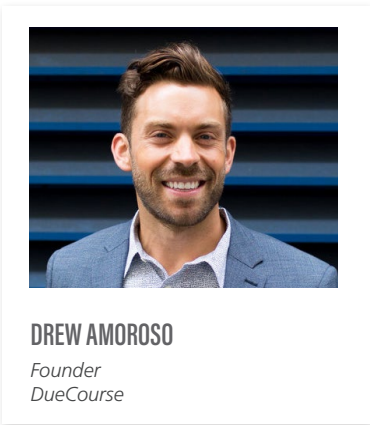
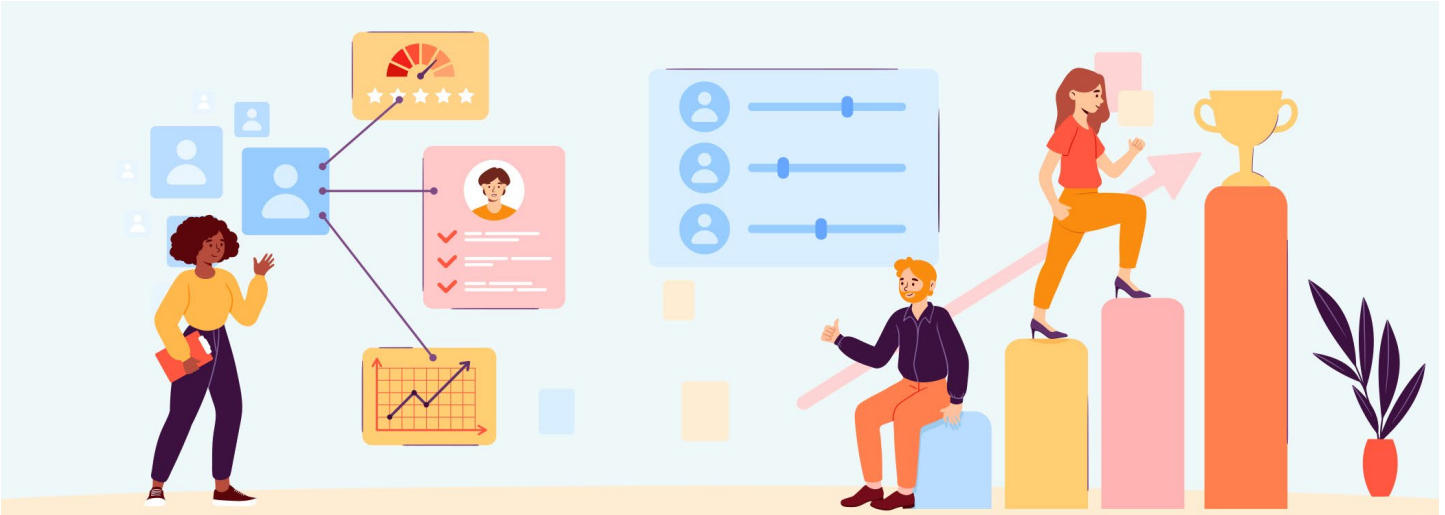
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6 Tips for Designing Effective Associate Evaluations

Consistent feedback can help employees learn and improve.

The associate evaluation process can be an incredible vehicle for reviewing, training and rewarding associates. For many law firms, however, it can be challenging to craft a process that effectively delivers feedback in a way that is specific, meaningful and actionable while at the same time engaging all the key stakeholders.

“Feedback is most effective when it’s received as close in time as possible to the behavior or issue being evaluated. It loses its impact when feedback is given months after the triggering event.”

Like many initiatives, evaluations require coordination and buy-in from everyone involved and must be structured in a way that provides a clear incentive and a strong “Why” behind the process.

Whether you are looking to implement a process for the first time or improve the one you have, here are six things to consider — from the perspective of both the reviewer and the reviewee.

1. PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONTINUOUS EVALUATION

It can be easy to default to a standardized, yearly evaluation cycle. But a truly effective evaluation process is one that includes continuous opportunities for associates to receive feedback.

Feedback is most effective when it’s received as close in time as possible to the behavior or issue being evaluated. It loses its impact when feedback is given months after the triggering event — it’s simply not as fresh in the reviewer and reviewee’s mind. As a result, the development of behavioral patterns often go unaddressed.

“The evaluation process is only effective if it actually translates into tangible steps. Therefore, feedback must be clear and actionable in order to make the most of the evaluation process.”

From a practical standpoint, consider implementing shorter check-in meetings — on a quarterly or even bimonthly basis — where partners, supervisors or even peers can provide feedback, share wins and discuss progress that has been made since the last check-in. These incremental opportunities help to build momentum and keep associates accountable for making progress.

This is particularly true for millennial workers who are looking for consistent feedback and personalized attention when it comes to their long-term career goals and day-to-day experience. Specifically, associates prefer to be evaluated “on the spot” as opposed to receiving feedback through a formal review.

“An evaluation process that feels perfunctory without any connection to compensation, advancement or skill-building action items will be seen as a time waste; that’s when we see low feedback provider participation and associates phoning in their self-evaluations,” says Jessica Sisco, Director of Talent at Scale LLP. “The most effective evaluation systems follow a stimulus-response pattern all year long.”

2. MAKE THE PROCESS “LESS FORMAL”

In terms of process, many associates are more comfortable with an evaluation process that is “less formal” than a standardized yearly review.

Day-to-day opportunities to receive instruction and pointers are essential for continual growth and behavior change. In other words, creating a culture where communication and discussion is the norm helps to build trust and can increase the frequency of the feedback loop.

Alongside your formal reviews, consider branding more frequent opportunities for evaluations in a way that is disarming — for example, a “check-in” or opportunity to “touch base.” These do not need to be elongated reviews and can be offered in 20 to 30 minute increments.

3. EVALUATE FROM A VARIETY OF ANGLES

Though it’s tempting to offer only one evaluation method for efficiency purposes, consider how you might offer opportunities for evaluation in different forms and mediums.

“Approach the evaluation process from a variety of angles,” says Sisco. “Offer email and in-person opt-in sessions that share examples of effective self-evaluations and feedback.”

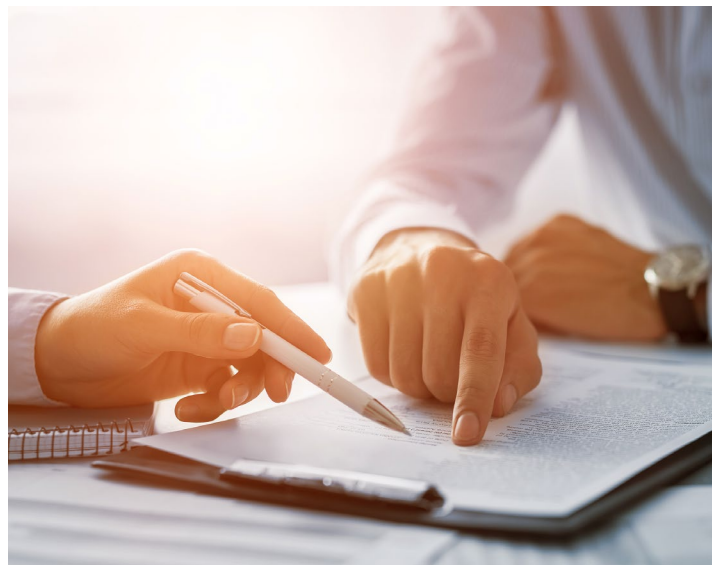
For example, offer one-to-one coaching opportunities for associates to craft the most helpful self-evaluation and do the same for partners who are tasked with doing the evaluating. Provide 15- and 20-minute pop-up sessions or short video overviews that offer everyone a window into how to provide and implement feedback effectively.

Coach them through how to deliver both positive and constructive feedback to arrive at an end result that benefits everyone on the team.

4. PROVIDE SPECIFIC EXAMPLES

When writing evaluations, encourage your evaluators to tie their comments to as many specific examples as possible. Although generalized comments are helpful for communicating themes, they do not allow associates to translate the feedback into actions that can be realized at a day-to-day, situational level.

When given real-life examples, it allows associates to spot opportunities to actually apply the feedback and use it to foster real, tangible changes in behavior. This often requires the provider to take an extra step but it’s an essential part of the process.



Giving constructive feedback can be difficult to provide, but it's that type of feedback associates want. According to the *Harvard Business Review*, employees prefer "corrective feedback" over praise and recognition because it offers a path forward to improvement.

When writing self-evaluations, also consider encouraging your associates to use specific examples to make their case. For the same reasons explained above, specificity provides those reading the evaluations a chance to see their work and progress in action.

5. TIE EVALUATIONS TO SPECIFIC ACTION STEPS

The evaluation process is only effective if it actually translates into tangible steps. Therefore, feedback must be clear and actionable in order to make the most of the evaluation process.

"[When crafting a process], create communication plans that explain the value of engaging in the process, keep all stakeholders accountable, make the evaluations easy to access and complete and tie the process to ROI for both the evaluators and the associates," says Sisco.

In other words, identify the action steps that both sides agree to take away from the process. Every evaluation should be tied to outcomes that address the substance and nature of the feedback.

Similarly, the actions and individual goals outlined in the evaluation should be linked to the firm's development competencies and overall strategy. The ability to see how the feedback fits into the bigger picture of the firm's strengths and weaknesses helps contextualize the feedback and provide clarity regarding the associate's career trajectory.

6. DEVELOP A CULTURE OF FEEDBACK

Finally, truly effective evaluation processes are defined by what happens in between the evaluations themselves. True change happens at the daily interaction level. So if you're looking to make the most of your evaluations, consider what efforts you might make to instill a culture of feedback at your firm.

Throughout the year, offer trainings or workshops that teach your teams how to provide effective feedback, deliver constructive criticism and open channels of communication. Trainings like these are highly effective when conducted with small- or medium-sized teams and include everyone in the team's work ecosystem.

A culture of feedback both builds perspective and is motivational because it shows a dedication from everyone on the team to improvement.

Although there are many things that contribute to an effective associate evaluation process, remember that crafting a process that works best for your firm is a fluid undertaking that should be reviewed consistently and refined incrementally over time. Consider asking some key stakeholders for their feedback and input on how best to design and administer the reviews. No process will be perfect — so be open to designing it with an eye toward progress.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Drew Amoroso is an Attorney, Public Speaker and Founder of DueCourse, a mobile application that helps professionals strengthen their workday mindset and show up at their best at work.

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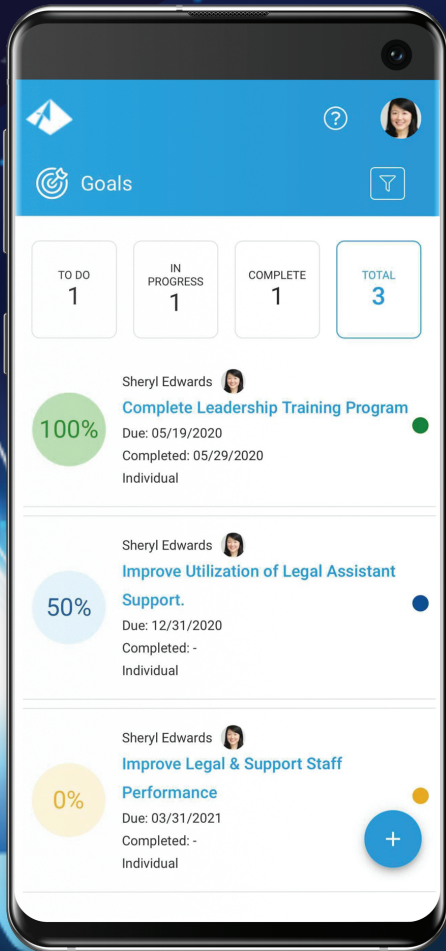
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SEVERINE HIERSO

*EMEA Senior Product Marketing
Manager
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“There are plenty of law firms out there. A prospective client will immediately look elsewhere if you don't ensure that you've made their experience on your website and elsewhere as smooth as possible.”

Get Clients to Notice You: 8 Tips for Creating Quality Content

Content marketing can help lawyers attract new clients and increase their business. When done correctly, content marketing can increase traffic and search engine optimization (SEO) rankings.

This is because content marketing is all about targeting a specific audience. For lawyers, that audience is old, current and potential clients. When drafting content for your firm, it needs to be designed and delivered with this demographic in mind.

The right content will make a lawyer and/or your firm overall appear reliable and professional. If a person is seeking your legal services, they will want to ensure that you are trustworthy and qualified to help them. Your brand must be visually appealing with a good marketing strategy, reassuring your clientele that you know what you're doing.

A simple website on its own won't achieve this. You need a broad content marketing strategy to increase your credibility as a lawyer. Thankfully, a good marketing strategy doesn't have to be expensive, so you can build your brand without busting the budget. Here's how to start.

1. SEO IS VITAL SO KNOW YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

Research your target audience thoroughly. (Hint: It's not "anyone seeking legal representation.") One way to do this is by creating surveys for your existing clients, asking questions that will help you understand why they decided to come to you for legal aid.

Some sample questions include:

- What do you most want and need from your lawyer?
- How did you find our firm?
- Why did you decide to opt for our legal services over others?

Then, mine the answers for specific words to use in your content strategy. (Real-time analytics software can also help you make the most of data mining.) Those keywords can also inform your SEO practices by telling you what potential clients are looking for the most. Law firm SEO tools can help here, as well.

Keep track of the most potent terms for you, and then employ them widely in your content marketing strategy. That way, those seeking legal aid will be most likely to come across your legal organization first.

2. BE FAMILIAR WITH YOUR COMPETITION

Your competition are all the firms and corporate legal departments that have the same target audience in mind as you do. This involves being familiar with — and keeping track of — their content strategies.

For instance, look at their blogs, and see what content they produce. Check out their websites, and see what designs and pages they include. Is your own website missing anything that could help it improve?

Lastly, make the most of SEO tools to search competitor domains, and discover the keywords they rank for. The highest-ranking keywords for your competition are words you should include in your own content.

3. CREATE A DIVERSE CONTENT STRATEGY

The key is to engage your target audience as much as you can, and the best way to do this is by producing a good range of content. This could look like live or prerecorded videos, interviews, podcasts, presentations, social media posts, infographics, ebooks and so much more.

Experimenting with different kinds of content is the best way to find out what types most resonate with your particular audience. When you discover which are most successful, you can then focus on producing more of those.

4. REPURPOSE CONTENT

Content tends to lose its relevance after a while, regardless of how strong its presence was when you wrote it. You don't want the impact of your SEO-informed writing to suffer as time passes. As a result, you have to repurpose your content frequently. It is one of the best ways to maintain your place on Google.

When looking to update your content, prioritize your best-performing posts and pages. Identify other topics you could

include to expand existing content. Another tip is to simply turn a piece of content into another type of content, say from an article to a social media snippet or a video. That will save you time, ensuring that your content is fluid and relevant as time passes.

5. STICK TO A SCHEDULE

Quality content should always be your priority, but consistency is also important. Maintaining your online presence with regular posts is one of the best strategies you can employ, and there are several ways you can easily do this.

Establish a schedule to help you organize when and how your content is being uploaded online. There are plenty of tools to help you achieve this, including enabling you to publish preuploaded content at specific times during the week.

Set reminders for all the different areas of your content strategy; it is one of the most efficient ways to stay organized and ensure you are producing content consistently. Learning to manage your time as efficiently as possible will also help you successfully stick to a schedule.

6. HAVE A STRONG BRAND IDENTITY

Your brand identity is all about your legal organization's core values, professional mission, backstory and the approaches you take with your clients. Take those values and stories and turn them into a full-fledged brand identity, whereby all of your content is centered around specific messages and values you want to share with your customers.

This ensures that your content evolves in a way that feels authoritative and trustworthy. After all, you are selling an experience, and your clients need to feel like they know what to expect if they choose your legal services.

7. OFFER TO WRITE GUEST POSTS

Writing guest posts is a great way to gain backlinks to your pages. This in turn helps you gain higher rankings on Google search results, leading to more traffic to your website. Reach out to websites and ask if they take guest posts. Many will even do so for free. Guest interviews are also another excellent backlink opportunity, so consider incorporating them into your strategy as well.

However, ensure you are picking professional websites to collaborate with. Spam-filled or poorly organized websites will only damage your credibility and fail to improve your SEO.

8. STRIVE FOR A SMOOTH USER EXPERIENCE

There are plenty of law firms out there. A prospective client will immediately look elsewhere if you don't ensure that you've made their experience on your website and elsewhere as smooth as possible.

Make sure your website is intuitive and well designed. Your content should be labeled, easy to find and simple to navigate. For instance, if you have a series of content videos, make sure they can all be found under the same subsection of your page — not scattered all over the place. Your contact details shouldn't be hard to find either, as this could prevent someone from reaching out.

Ensure everything is correctly linked and your website offers easy access to your blog and social media pages — including your LinkedIn profile. Post customer reviews on your page, too, so prospective clients can quickly see that you are a reputable lawyer with a lot of experience.

As a legal organization, you'll naturally have regular competition. Engaging and SEO-fueled content can considerably increase your chances of winning over clients. If you publish content consistently — and in various formats — you will ensure you are reaching wide audiences over multiple platforms.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Severine Hierso is EMEA Senior Product Marketing Manager for RingCentral Office. She has gained extensive international product marketing, market research, sales enablement and business development experience across SaaS, telecommunications, video conferencing and technology sectors within companies such as Sony, Cisco, Cogeco Peer 1 and Dimension Data/NTT. Hierso has also published articles for domains such as Recruiterflow and DuoCircle.

 ringcentral.com

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Studying for CLM Success

With the Certified Legal Manager (CLM)[®] exam again just around the corner this November, it's time to start hitting the books and ramping up your studying. But you may be asking, what is the best way for me to study?

Fortunately, ALA Chicago has just the answer: join a study group. Formed in 2007, the Chicago CLM study group has offered test-takers the ability to collaborate with their peers as they prepare for what is always a challenging exam.

According to Mary Ann Rojas, CLM, SPHR, SHRM-SCP, ALA Chicago Chapter Past President, Office Administrator at Goldberg Kohn Ltd. and former CLM Director, the group started as a series of get-togethers among a few members just to compare notes. "We met weekly and even more often when the test got closer," says Rojas. "We would take turns covering different subject areas."

Now, however, the study group has become a major draw, with 40 people participating in advance of last fall's exam. Fifteen other chapters have even started their own group. "The study group is successful because it has targeted, one-hour study sessions, all designed to touch on the various knowledge areas included on the CLM exam," says Rita Nielsen, CLM, PHR, SHRM-CP, ALA Chicago CLM Director and Office Administrator at Locke Lord LLP.

Nielsen adds that sessions often include subject matter experts with experience in certain knowledge areas, along with practice quizzes and a voluminous library of reference materials. "It gives [participants] a sense of where to begin and how to focus," Nielsen says.



JUSTIN ASKENAZY

*Associate Editor
Association of Legal Administrators*

“By opening our study group to all of ALA, we have increased the number of CLMs internationally, met some wonderful people across the country and have made many good friends along the way.”

The study group is also open to ALA members who don't belong to ALA Chicago. "By opening our study group to all of ALA," Rojas says, "we have increased the number of CLMs internationally, met some wonderful people across the country and have made many good friends along the way."

The CLM exam is a great way to achieve industry certification and add another qualification to your resume, as *Legal Management* reported in January. The test is administered twice a year — in the spring and fall — and assesses knowledge in the areas of financial management, human resources, legal industry/business management and operations management.

Outside of study groups, there are several ways to prepare for the exam. ALA provides a study guide as well as a 10-part webinar bundle that contains much of the essential information you'll need.

But if you're looking to collaborate and compare notes with your fellow chapter members, ALA Chicago's CLM study group has advice on how to start your own chapter group.

"It does take some work," says Rojas, but there are resources available. For example, your chapter's business partners can serve as subject matter experts. The Chicago CLM website offers materials on how the CLM Study Group operates, and

prospective study group founders are encouraged to contact Nielsen for more information.

"Bottom line — the support of a study group is nothing you can find in a textbook or online resource," Rojas says. "That support and personal attention are a key part of success on the exam."




READY TO TAKE THE CLM JOURNEY?

We've got you! Check out ALA in a Minute video at bit.ly/CLM-minute on what steps to take for certification. Then visit alanet.org/education/certification where you'll find important upcoming dates and more information to help you study. And be sure to check out our newest CLMs listed in this issue!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Justin Askenazy is the Associate Editor at ALA. He holds a bachelor's degree in journalism and has experience covering political and local news.

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**OMAR OCHOA**

Founder
Omar Ochoa Law Firm

“Perhaps the single biggest mistake that any law firm manager could make is to be afraid of spending money. You need to invest in your growth.”

Cash Flow Can Help Your Firm Grow

Being a legal manager at a firm startup is exciting. Law schools don't teach lawyers how to run a business, so this is where you can really dig in and play a vital role in the firm's success.

When your firm reaches a certain level of stability, growth is the next natural step in its progression. The prospect of growth is undoubtedly exciting because it indicates you are experiencing a solid level of success. However, it can also be an intimidating process if you aren't prepared to handle all the moving parts that go into growing a firm. But with the proper level of planning, you can help your firm realize its full potential.

THE COST OF GROWTH

The first thing that law firm managers need to keep in mind when managing growth is the cost of added salaries. These are the obvious, hard costs of expansion. When taking on more cases, you need more people to handle those cases, and you have to pay them. Your cash flow and caseload will determine how much you can grow. If you don't have the level of work and, therefore, income to justify having a significantly larger staff, it doesn't make sense to expand.

There are also other hidden costs that are much harder to quantify upfront. These costs — such as HR service, payroll service and supervision costs — are essential parts of running the business, but they can easily be forgotten or neglected as they aren't the direct payment of staff. As you continue to add more employees, these products will be necessary.

Even further, there are physical costs that come along with growth. As the firm adds more staff, you'll need to add office space. (Unless you are operating hybrid

or fully remote. But that’s for another article.) It would be unreasonable to expect a team of eight lawyers to work in the same amount of space as a team of four. That also means you’ll have to provide more and better supplies for your office.

MISTAKES TO AVOID WHEN GROWING

Perhaps the single biggest mistake that any law firm manager could make is to be afraid of spending money. You need to work with your firm’s managing partners to help them see the importance of investing in the firm’s growth. Just like starting a business is risky, investing in your business’s expansion is risky. Some people are comfortable staying where they are at, which is great, as long as it is sustainable. But for those who want to accomplish more ambitious goals, growth is necessary, so it is vital to embrace it.

Do not cut corners. That will significantly drop your productivity and quality of service. Low-bandwidth internet may save you a couple of hundred dollars but might also cost you extra in time. Is saving a bit of money worth the inconvenience that it will cause? Probably not.

Another thing about growth that can be scary is hitting a wall. Sometimes managers hesitate to continue adding more staff, but without those extra hands on deck, the firm’s growth may not be sustainable. Once your staff is spread too thin, you run into an issue with the quality of your service. If you’re going to expand, you need to have the staff it takes to provide each client with the service and attention they deserve.

Growing your law firm doesn’t have to be intimidating. As long as you stay on top of your cash flow and continue to grow at a sustainable rate, everything can be manageable. Find the right balance between consistent growth and helping your firm keep up with the demand of your clients.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Omar Ochoa is an award-winning lawyer, certified public accountant, financial expert and Founder of Omar Ochoa Law Firm. His legal specialties include antitrust, class actions, insurance matters, securities, oil and gas, trade secrets, construction law, environmental law, qui tam, the Fair Credit Reporting Act, employment matters, private equity transactions and breaches of contract.

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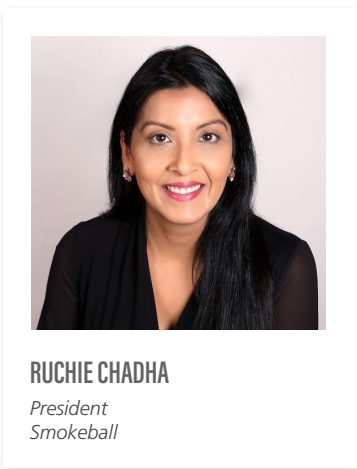


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RUCHIE CHADHA
President
Smokeball

Strengthen Your Internal Communications to Fortify Your Law Firm’s Future

Prior to 2020, law firm colleagues communicated in hallways and conference rooms, on coffee breaks and during desk-side chats. Building and maintaining connections was built into our everyday routines.

In 2022, firms have disassembled, re-examined and rebuilt those routines to meet the new reality of hybrid work. But many still struggle to replicate a sense of in-office connection.

A study of 61,000 employees at Microsoft, which went from 18% remote to almost 100% remote in March 2020, found individuals spent 25% less time collaborating across teams and also spent less time with “new connections” — colleagues they hadn’t previously worked with. We did our own survey related to these issues and the Great Resignation and found that 64% of firm leaders say the lack of in-person interaction hurt their practice’s culture. Nearly all (89%) of these firms work in a hybrid setting at least one day a week.

With hybrid as the new normal, it’s critical that law firms adopt effective internal communication strategies, paired with technology to enable greater productivity, foster healthy work-life balance and maintain the connections that make your firm a special place to work.

PRODUCTIVITY AND EFFICIENCY GO HAND IN HAND

Communication isn’t the only aspect of firm life to suddenly shift in 2020. Even the slowest-to-adjust legal practices were forced to take their physical files to the cloud, accept electronic signatures and bill clients through online portals.

“
Make changes based on employee suggestions and expert advice, including setting boundaries on when and how clients — and even colleagues — can communicate.”

This technology didn't just help firms keep the lights on during 2020 and 2021 — it had a measurable effect on the way they do business. Our own survey found that more than 60% of firms that added client intake software increased their billable hours. And 45% that began using collaboration software also added new areas of law to their practice.

By adding technology that enables a consistent client experience and better teamwork, these firms actually grew their practices during COVID-19. At the same time, 22% of firms told us they decreased their overall hours worked thanks to new technology — they grew more efficient because of tools that eliminate manual processes, deliver a universal view of the firm and organize all matter communications in one place.

The bottom line: When every member of your firm can easily access every file related to a case, they'll have more informed, productive conversations — without the “where's this document?” moments.

FOSTERING A HEALTHY WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Initially, law firms may have worried that a lack of in-person monitoring would lead to teams working fewer hours while at home. Instead, one 2020 survey found 45% of professionals regularly work more hours during the week than before the pandemic, while another showed employees spend 10% more time logged in every week.

This over-work, compounded by uncertainty, led to the addition of “burnout” to the American vocabulary. Last year, on average, 89% of full-time U.S. employees reported experiencing burnout while working remotely.

Due to the nonstop nature of the profession, attorneys and legal staffers were already familiar with feelings of exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress that define burnout. More than two-thirds of firm leaders who responded to our survey reported personally experiencing burnout since the pandemic began.

The bottom line: Open conversation is the difference-maker for employee retention and business success. While overall, 95% of firms reported to us that they were optimistic about their long-term futures, that number dropped to 66% among leaders who were unsure how many employees had reported burnout.

STRUGGLING TO CONNECT? THINK SMALLER

Routine workplace conversations — what one new study calls “relational communication” — naturally have suffered



in the hybrid workplace. The effects: loneliness and feelings of isolation; a decrease in social support from the workplace community; and a higher threshold to contact with colleagues, among others.

The solution: Think smaller. Employees in Microsoft's study spent more time communicating and therefore built stronger connections with members of their immediate team. And 33% of firms with two to five employees in our study actually reported a positive effect from COVID — the environment bolstered all-hands-on-deck camaraderie.

Help teams connect in smaller groups related to mutual interests — like pets or sports teams — via internal communication tools. Assign official mentors to new employees and encourage employees to form their own informal mentorships.

And — relying on your firm's legal calendaring tool — schedule an in-person reunion. (For example, at Smokeball, we're in the midst of planning our second annual Homecoming week.)

The bottom line: Hybrid workplace communications are inherently different from in-person. By reuniting around common interests and goals — supporting your community, your clients and one another — you can strengthen your firm for the long-term.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ruchie Chadha is President of Smokeball, a company that specializes in cloud-based legal practice management software. Before joining Smokeball, Chadha was a family law attorney in the Chicago area. She now focuses her career on delivering innovative solutions to lawyers so they can better serve their clients and build healthier businesses.

 smokeball.com

Anniversaries, Awards and Appointments

Members on the Move >>



Stacey Anouan, a member of the Indiana Chapter, is now Firm Administrator at Purple Ink, LLC, in Carmel, Indiana.



Margie Diaz (not pictured), a member of the South Florida Chapter, is now Office Administrator at Cummings & Lockwood, LLC, in Naples, Florida.



Erica Fine, an independent member, is now Director of Human Resources at Shutts & Bowen LLP in Miami, Florida.



Megan Henry (not pictured), a member of the First State Chapter, is now Chief Operating Officer at Abrams & Bayliss, LLP, in Wilmington, Delaware.



Jennifer Javaheri (not pictured), a member of the Greater Los Angeles Chapter, is now Regional Office Administrator at Stroock & Stroock & Lavan LLP in Los Angeles, California.



Kimberly King, a member of the Richmond Chapter, is now Office Administrator at Whiteford Taylor Preston, LLP, in Richmond, Virginia.



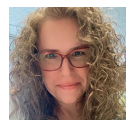
Amanda Lorentz (not pictured), an independent member, is now Director of Practice Management and Operations – Business Division at Fredrikson & Byron, P.A., in Minneapolis, Minnesota.



Tammy Meierdierck, a member of the Jacksonville Chapter, is now Legal Administrator at Creed & Gowdy in Jacksonville, Florida.



Karina Méndez Rosales, a member of the Mexico Chapter, is now Head of Marketing and BD at Mijares Angoitia Cortes y Fuentes, SC, in Mexico City, Mexico.



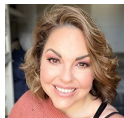
Victoria Page, a member of the Maryland Chapter, is now Director of Operations and Finance at Niles, Barton & Wilmer, LLP, in Baltimore, Maryland.



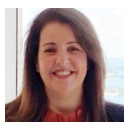
Melissa Tokar, a member of the New Orleans Chapter, is now Chief Administrative Officer at Irwin Fritchie Urquhart & Moore LLC in New Orleans, Louisiana.



Katherine Dart, a member of the New Jersey Chapter, is now Office Manager at Kennedys Law LLP in Basking Ridge, New Jersey.



Tara Figueroa, a member of the New York City Chapter, is now Director of People and Operations at Goetz Fitzpatrick LLP in New York, New York.



Beatriz Guilarte-Acuna, a member of the South Florida Chapter, is now Office Administrator at Winston & Strawn LLP in Miami, Florida.



Althea Hunt, CLM, SPHR, SHRM-SCP (not pictured), a member of the Capital Chapter, is now Executive Director of Administration and Finance at Piliro Mazza in Washington, D.C.



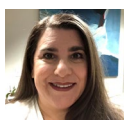
Shaun Jones, a member of the Philadelphia Chapter, is now Office Manager at Clark Hill in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



Sandy Lavender, a member of the Arizona Chapter, is now Office Administrator for the Arizona office at Lewis Roca in Phoenix, Arizona.



Michael McDearmon, a member of the Dallas Chapter, is now Firm Administrator at Scheef & Stone, LLP, in Dallas, Texas.



Krista Mencarelli, an independent member, is now Executive Director at Severson & Werson, PC, in San Francisco, California.



Cristina Osga, a member of the Mile High Chapter, is now Firm Administrator at White Bear Ankele Tanaka & Waldron in Centennial, Colorado.



Jennifer Scott, a member of the Chicago Chapter, is now Office Administrator at Akerman LLP in Chicago, Illinois.



Laura Wickliff, PHR, SHRM-CP, a member of the Capital Chapter, is now Chief Human Resources Officer at Lewis Roca in Phoenix, Arizona.

What's Happening at Headquarters



Congratulations to the Recipients of the Susan L. French Emerging Leaders Fellowship Initiative!

Last month, the Foundation of ALA named Julie Cooney, Office Services Supervisor at Shuffield Lowman & Wilson, P.A., and Lesley Hakes, SHRM-CP, Human Resources Coordinator at Lewis Rice LLC, the recipients of the Susan L. French Program.

The fellowship program was developed to assist up to two ALA members annually who have a strong desire to enhance their personal and professional leadership skills. The first year of this two-year fellowship program provides a registration and travel stipend to ALA's Chapter Leadership Institute; a personalized series of leadership-

focused coaching sessions with Judy Hissong, CLM, PCC, a distinguished leadership consultant; as well as other leadership mentoring and course curriculum. Program participants will have an assigned mentor for the first year and will be expected to assume a mentorship role to a future fellowship recipient in the second year of their fellowship.

Kudos to the Spring 2022 CLM Recipients!

Congratulations are also in order for the five administrators who passed this spring's CLM exam and are now Certified Legal Managers:

- Lori Christine Dodge, CLM, SHRM-CP, CPP, Accounting Manager at Ross Scalise Law Group in Austin, Texas
- Kari Fougner, CLM, Operations Manager at Brotman Law in San Diego, California
- Alicia W. Lewis, CLM, Firm Administrator at Anderson Jones, PLLC, in Raleigh, North Carolina
- Katie Tullis, CLM, Executive Director at Beck Redden LLP in Houston, Texas
- Kristin R. Wolf, CLM, Office Manager at Benjamin L. England & Associates, LLC, in Glen Burnie, Maryland

Obtaining CLM certification shows great initiative and dedication to the profession and demonstrates the mastery of a highly proficient legal administrator. Learn more about pursuing your own CLM certification at alanet.org/education/credentialing.



Be on the Lookout for the *Legal Management* Print Issue!

The annual print issue of *Legal Management* will be arriving in a mailbox near you this month! Inside the wellness-themed edition, look for articles about how mental health and wellness can be incorporated into your firm's culture, as well as how to reduce the role of alcohol in firm events. We also asked ALA members and business partners to share their wellness tips; we hope you'll take some inspiration from them.

What's Happening at Headquarters



ALA Roundtable: Implementing a Legal Assistant Pool

Are you wondering how to set up a legal assistant pool at your firm? Register at alanet.org/networking/virtual-member-meetups#roundtable for ALA's Roundtable on July 22 at 12 p.m. Central, where experts will discuss how to design a system that best serves your firm's attorneys.

And for more tips on legal assistant pooling, check out our March cover story, 8 Tips for Creating Effective Modern Legal Assistant Pools at legalmanagement.org/2022/march/features/8-tips-for-creating-effective-modern-legal-assistant-pools.

Save the Date: Annual Conference 2023

Registration is open for ALA's 2023 Annual Conference & Expo, to be held May 7–10 in Seattle, Washington! Sign up now ALAannualconf.org for the chance to connect with your peers and learn from presenters and exhibitors.

Come see why members love to attend year after year!

A promotional graphic for the ALA 2023 Annual Conference & Expo. The background is a cityscape of Seattle with the Space Needle. The graphic features a large blue circle with 'ALA 2023' in white, and a large green circle with 'ANNUAL CONFERENCE & EXPO May 7-10' in white. A white speech bubble in the top right says 'Register before February 10, 2023, and SAVE!'. A QR code is in the bottom left with the text 'REGISTER NOW!' and 'Registration Code: B00-690-690AX10'. The ALA logo and '#ALACnf23 ALAannualconf.org' are in the bottom right.