legal management

Setting Up New Managers for Success

How to Protect Your Employees from All Forms of Workplace Violence

The Benefits of Running a Law Firm Like a Business

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How ALA Is Helping Managers Succeed, Not Just Survive

Giving new managers the space and resources to grow is essential for the health of any organization.

BY ERYN CARTER, CAE

> "Managers should know what success looks like — not just in spreadsheets but in how they support their teams, contribute to a positive work culture, and communicate their opinions about what is working well and what needs to be improved."

I vividly remember being promoted to a manager position for the first time early in my career. I was so excited to have been recognized for the work I was doing, and I was ready — or so I thought — for the added responsibility of managing people and projects. Admittedly, in my first few months in the role, I was not a good manager. The enthusiasm and confidence in what I thought I could accomplish were soon moderated by a big dose of reality about what being a manager would entail.

Those early days of being a manager felt a bit like being a circus performer — juggling flaming torches while riding a unicycle blindfolded. It was a delicate balance between keeping my team motivated, hitting organizational goals and not accidentally setting myself (or anyone else) on fire. After experiencing many years of successes and failures, I have learned that managers are always key performers in the show, but we are not always the main attractions. At ALA, one of the keys to setting managers up for success is to help them understand how they can move between the role of being the performer to being the director behind the scenes and sometimes even being a spectator to cheer on your team and allow them to shine.

Here are some of the skills and advice I acquired that I've tried to employ to support managers in navigating the responsibilities of their role.

SETTING CLEAR EXPECTATIONS AND GIVING FEEDBACK

One thing that can help prevent a manager from spiraling into confusion is to give them clear goals, realistic expectations, and a roadmap that can be pressure-tested against real-life circumstances and is flexible enough to change if needed. Managers should know what success looks like — not just in spreadsheets but in how they support their teams, contribute to a positive work culture, and communicate their opinions about what is working well and what needs to be improved.

It is hard to thrive in a feedback vacuum. Regular check-ins help managers know if they're on the right track or accidentally steering the ship off course. However, feedback should be a two-way street —managers should be prepared to deliver and receive feedback about the good, the bad and the awkward. There is no one way to do this, but it should be done in a way that best serves the manager, their team and the organization.

LEADERSHIP TRAINING

After I became a manager, I quickly learned that being good at your job doesn't automatically mean you'll be a great manager. Leadership requires a skill set that includes having honest conversations that may not always be what you or someone else wants to hear and inspiring a team to do their best work on good and bad days. At ALA, we believe in giving managers training and a safe space to say, "This isn't working," or to ask, "Is this normal?" Supplementing managers' existing skills with leadership skills is an essential investment in their growth.

EMPOWERMENT AND TRUST

Micromanagement is the fastest way to make a manager feel like an overpaid babysitter. Empowering them to lead, make decisions and (occasionally) make mistakes without fear gives managers autonomy without setting them adrift to survive on their own. If someone has a manager position, I expect they can be successful with clear guidelines, allowing me to step back and watch them shine. However, the road to success can be quite bumpy if managers can't articulate when and how they need help. We want them to feel comfortable saying, "I have a problem," and be able to suggest solutions. This helps to build trust and develop a mindset and reputation as a problem solver, not as the receiver of others' concerns.

TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Managers need the right tools. Whether it's software, a streamlined process, or just easy ways to recognize and reward their teams, giving managers the necessary resources prevents unnecessary difficulties. The manager's manager, the HR department and trusted external networks are resources that can also help support a manager's success.

RECOGNITION

Managing people is tough, and sometimes it can feel thankless. A little recognition — whether it's an award, a shout-out in a meeting, or just a heartfelt "thank you" — goes a long way. Leadership can be exhausting at times, so celebrating the wins (big and small) and letting managers know their work matters can be rejuvenating.

At ALA, we believe strong managers create strong teams, and strong teams support strong organizations. When we invest in their development, give them the right tools and show appreciation for their hard work, ALA, its members, business partners and the legal industry win. It's been many years since my first manager position, but I'm still learning and striving to get better. I hope to pass on what I've learned to help set managers up for success, not just survival. Cheers to all the great managers everywhere!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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The Hidden Costs of Low Tech Engagement in Law Firms — And How to Fix It

Underutilized technology may be costing your firm more than just money. Here's how to make sure you're maximizing the investments in your tech and your people.

BY ASIF REHMANI

> "A little support goes a long way. Make it okay to ask questions and share a quick tip or trick. Your team should feel like they're on a journey together, not struggling alone."

Running a law firm is a balancing act. You're managing the chaos, steering the ship and trying to make sure the crew is rowing in the same direction. So you bring in new technology — tools that promise to make the ride smoother. But what happens when the tech sits unused, gathering digital dust?

It quietly drains time, money and morale. Let's dig into why, and more importantly, how you can flip the script.

THE HIDDEN COSTS

Ever paid for a gym membership and never used it? Tech investment is the same. Great in theory, useless if it's ignored. Here's what underused software really costs you:

» **Wasted Investments:** Every unused license and every forgotten login means every dollar goes down the drain.

» **Slower Workflows:** When people sidestep new tools and stick with what they know, efficiency takes a nosedive.

» **Frustration:** If the tech isn't helping, it becomes just another obstacle. Another thing on the to-do list that never gets done.

Underused tech is a signal. It says, "We're not getting what we need to make this work."

WHY ISN'T IT WORKING?

Before we dive into solutions, let's take a look at what's holding back tech adoption in your firm.

1. Training That Fizzles Out

Day-one enthusiasm is there. But day 50? That's when things start to fade. Training that stops after a single session is like planting seeds and never watering them. Without reinforcement, people fall back into old habits.

2. The Comfort Zone Trap

Change isn't just uncomfortable; it's a threat to the familiar. Law firms are steeped in tradition. If a tool feels like it's disrupting the status quo, employees will step around it, not into it.

3. Too Much, Too Fast

When your team is already swamped, adding "learn this new tool" to their plate can feel like tossing a brick to a drowning person. Tech can't be another burden — it has to be a lifeline.

HOW TO FIX IT

Now, here's where you take back control.

Start with a Training Needs Assessment

Know what your team actually needs — not what you think they need, but what they're telling you through their questions, their hesitations and their sighs when the new software opens. A training needs assessment is your cheat sheet to provide useful support.

Build a Real Digital Adoption Strategy

A digital adoption strategy is your plan for how training, reinforcement and support will work together. It's how you turn tech from a forgotten tool into a natural part of the workflow.

Make it simple:

» Plan out training in phases.

» Set up ways for people to get answers when they need them.

» Track progress so you can see what's working (and what's not).

Offer In-Context Training

Nobody wants to stop what they're doing to figure out how a feature works. In-context training is like having a coach on the sidelines. When someone's in the middle of drafting a document or navigating a client file, guidance appears right there, ready to help.

Imagine this: Your admin needs to add a file to a new case management system. Instead of fumbling through tabs or calling IT, they get an instant, step-by-step guide in the tool itself using a digital adoption platform. Problem solved and stress reduced.

Create a Culture of Help and Curiosity

A little support goes a long way. Make it okay to ask questions and share a quick tip or trick. Your team should feel like they're on a journey together, not struggling alone.

» Hold quick, informal Q&A huddles.

» Celebrate when someone nails using a new feature.

» Send out bite-sized video tips for common questions.

When people feel supported, they don't resist change — they ride with it.

Roll Out Slowly, Win Fast

Too much at once can be overwhelming. Roll out new tech in chunks to let people get good at one thing before adding another. And when they master it? Celebrate that win. Build momentum.

Pro tip: Start with a pilot group. Get their feedback, make adjustments and then expand. They become your champions — the ones who help others see that the tool works.

THE PAYOFF

Adoption is all about making the tool work for your people. When that happens, you get:

» **More Productivity:** Less wasted time and more doing what matters.

» **Fewer Mistakes:** Tools are used correctly, and compliance improves.

» **Happier Teams:** Confident people don't dread tech —they embrace it.

Take a look at the tools collecting dust. Ask the hard question: Why aren't they being used?

Tech should work for you, not against you. Turn it from an investment you forget into one that fuels your team's success.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Asif Rehmani is the Chief Executive Officer of VisualSP, a leading SaaS company specializing in employee end-user support and training.

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Crafting a Competitive Edge Through Marketing Teams

Small and mid-sized firms should balance outsourcing and internal resources to build a marketing team that helps their attorneys stand out.

BY MURRAY M. COFFEY

> "
> **A successful marketing strategy requires a core internal team that not only manages and integrates outsourced efforts but also actively contributes to their own deliverables.**"

In its 2025 Attorney Rate-Setting Trends summary, Valeo Partners forecasts that Am Law 100 firms will increase hourly rates by 9% to 12% for partners and 8% to 11% for associates. This projection suggests that senior partners at top-grossing firms could bill nearly $3,000 per hour this year.

The continuing acceleration of billing rates coupled with the ongoing consolidation of some of the largest firms in the profession potentially provides medium-sized law firms with an unprecedented opportunity to capture work migrating from large firms. These shifts are fueled by clients prioritizing value and exceptional legal expertise over sheer firm size.

However, a critical hurdle stands in the way: marketing resources. The challenge lies in determining the best way for small- and medium-sized firms to cost-effectively approach their marketing needs without sacrificing quality or reach. While many marketing tasks can be effectively outsourced, a hybrid approach that combines internal resources with external professionals often yields the best results.

This article focuses on firms operating in the B2B space, such as those specializing in sophisticated corporate work, commercial litigation or other business-oriented legal services. Firms focused on personal injury, consumer legal needs such as estate planning, criminal law, or personal bankruptcy will have quite different marketing requirements.

STARTING WITH AN AUDIT AND EVALUATION

Before making decisions about marketing strategies, firms should begin with a thorough audit and evaluation of their current capabilities and needs. Many firms may be able to evaluate their client base and marketing efforts independently, using internal insights to identify gaps and opportunities. However, engaging an experienced marketing and business development consultant — particularly one with in-house law firm experience — can help expedite the process and lead to more efficient and targeted solutions. A consultant's expertise can provide additional clarity and ensure that the audit aligns with the firm's strategic goals.

THE CASE FOR SMART OUTSOURCING

Outsourcing marketing functions can provide immediate capacity and expertise without the overhead of full-time hires. External providers offer specialized skills that are often too costly or impractical for smaller firms to maintain in-house. For example:

1. **Brand Development:** Branding firms can craft compelling narratives and visual identities that differentiate your firm in a crowded market. This expertise, while extraordinarily important, is often needed on an episodic basis, making outsourcing a practical choice.

2. **Content Creation:** Freelance writers, graphic designers and video production teams can produce high-quality marketing materials on an as-needed basis, ensuring cost-effectiveness and flexibility.

3. **Digital Marketing:** Agencies specializing in search engine optimization (SEO), social media management and paid advertising bring technical knowledge and tools that are challenging for small in-house teams to replicate.

4. **Market Research:** Outsourced professionals can provide deep insights into industry trends, competitor analysis and client preferences, allowing firms to make data-driven decisions without a long-term investment in internal staff.
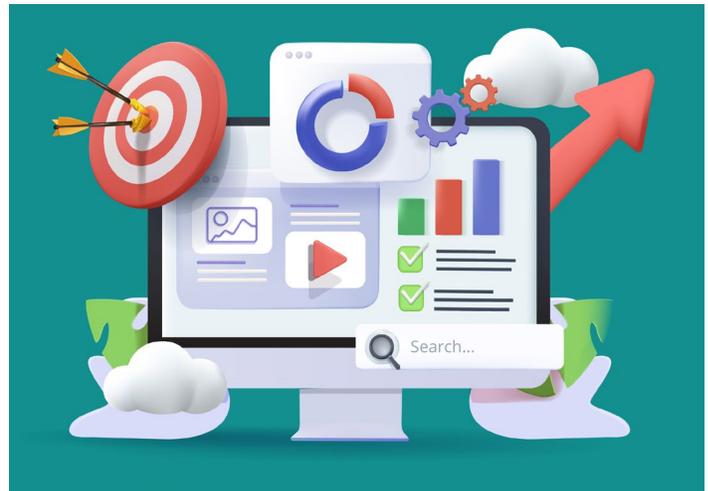
While outsourcing offers many benefits, it is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Over-reliance on external resources can lead to inefficiencies, misaligned messaging and a lack of internal accountability. That is where strategic internal hires come into play.

BUILDING INTERNAL CAPACITY

A successful marketing strategy requires a core internal team that not only manages and integrates outsourced efforts but also actively contributes to their own deliverables. This team should work on strategic and operational tasks while ensuring alignment between the firm's leadership and external providers.

Outsourced resources should complement the internal team by providing additional capacity and deeper expertise and advising in specialized areas. Such a structure ensures that all marketing initiatives are cohesive, impactful and aligned with the firm's strategic goals. Consider the following internal roles:

1. **Marketing Manager:** This individual should have the skills to manage external vendors, coordinate campaigns and measure return on investment (ROI). A marketing manager with a background in professional services is particularly valuable, as they understand the nuances of law firm marketing.

2. **Business Development Specialist:** Tasked with identifying and nurturing client opportunities, this role complements marketing efforts by focusing on relationship building and lead generation.

3. **Content Strategist:** Having an in-house expert to guide content direction ensures consistency and relevance across all marketing channels, even if the actual content production is outsourced.

Staffing ratios are often used as benchmarks to determine the appropriate number of marketing professionals relative to lawyers. While these ratios can be helpful, they should not be considered rigid or controlling. Small firms with a limited number of revenue producers may operate effectively with higher lawyer-to-marketer ratios. However, firms with aggressive revenue goals, heavy reliance on lateral recruitment for growth or a focus on expanding market share often require significantly lower ratios to meet their objectives. If staffing is going to be constrained due to budget or other reasons, incorporating a hybrid approach can help to offset the often-voluminous workflow many marketing departments experience. The previously referenced audit of the firm's needs, goals and market strategy will uncover these requirements and provide the necessary insights before any hiring decisions are made.

SIMPLIFYING MARKETING WITH CONFIGURABLE SOFTWARE TOOLS

One of the most significant barriers to effective marketing in small- and medium-sized firms is the lack of structure. Simple, user-friendly tools can make a substantial difference:

1. **Experience Management Platforms:** These platforms simplify tracking and presenting the firm's successes, particularly for B2B clients. They enable firms to showcase their experience effectively.

2. **Customer Relationship Management Systems:** Proven CRM solutions exist to fit specific firm needs, enabling seamless integration with email and digital marketing tools. These systems can often track client engagement and automate follow-ups effectively.

3. **Analytics Dashboards:** Platforms providing real-time data on website traffic, user behavior and campaign performance help firms refine strategies and measure success.

Most marketing technology platforms are now cloud-based, minimizing IT support needs and embedding robust security measures. This allows firms to adopt sophisticated tools without extensive internal technical resources.

TAILORED STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Every firm is unique, and the optimal balance between outsourcing and internal capacity will vary. The key is to evaluate your firm's specific needs, strengths and limitations. Consider the following steps:

1. **Set Clear Objectives:** Define what success looks like for your marketing efforts. Whether it is increasing website traffic, improving client retention or generating new leads, clear goals will guide your decisions.

2. **Invest in Training:** Equip your internal team with the skills they need to manage external providers and use marketing tools effectively. This investment pays dividends in improved efficiency and results.

3. **Build a Feedback Loop:** Regularly review the performance of both internal staff and outsourced vendors. Use metrics to determine what is working and where adjustments are needed.

The choice to outsource or build in-house capabilities is not binary. Instead, it is about finding the right mix that aligns with your firm's goals and resources. With the right strategies and investments, small- and medium-sized firms in the B2B space can overcome the marketing challenges they face and seize the opportunities before them.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Murray M. Coffey draws on more than 30 years of legal and marketing leadership to help law firms sharpen strategy, grow revenue and deepen client relationships. A former criminal defense attorney and veteran law firm Chief Marketing Officer, he now leads M. Coffey Consulting, partnering with firms to drive smarter business development, enhance client engagement and strengthen marketing teams.

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How the Latest Tech Tools Can Help Your Firm with Budgeting and Forecasting

Automation and artificial intelligence can play an integral role in simplifying financial planning and helping your firm grow.

BY MAYA HOCKLEY

> " The future of profitability analysis, budgeting, and forecasting is data-driven, automated and powered by AI. Don't let your firm miss out on these opportunities."

For many law firms, planning, budgeting and forecasting are constant challenges. These financial activities are critical for steering strategy and ensuring long-term profitability. Yet firms often struggle with disjointed data, inefficient manual processes and slow decision-making. While traditional tools may have worked in the past, the evolving legal landscape demands a modern approach to financial management.

The solution lies in embracing automation, digital transformation and artificial intelligence (AI). These technologies are transforming industries, yet many law firms overlook their potential for profitability analysis, planning and forecasting. Why are firms hesitant to adopt these tools, and how can they help drive growth?

THE PLANNING, BUDGETING AND FORECASTING STRUGGLE

Law firms face several common challenges in financial management:

1. **Manual Processes:** Many firms rely on spreadsheets, emails and basic accounting tools, which are time-consuming, error-prone and inefficient.

2. **Disjointed Data:** Data from time-tracking, billing and enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems often remains siloed, making it difficult to create a unified, accurate view for decision-making.

3. **Lack of Real-Time Insights:** Without real-time data, firms base forecasts on assumptions rather than trends, leading to inaccurate projections.

4. **Limited Resources:** Finance teams, especially in smaller firms, often lack the bandwidth to focus on strategic tasks like long-term forecasting, as they are bogged down by administrative work.

These challenges are not insurmountable. By adopting modern technologies, firms can streamline processes, improve accuracy and focus on growth.

HOW AUTOMATION, DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND AI CAN HELP

Modern tools can transform how law firms approach profitability analysis, budgeting and forecasting. Here's how:

1. Automation: Streamlining Repetitive Tasks

Automation eliminates manual, repetitive tasks like time tracking, invoicing and budget updates, freeing up resources and improving data accuracy.

BENEFITS:

» Reduces human error and saves time
» Ensures consistent, timely data entry
» Allows finance teams to focus on strategic activities

2. Digital Transformation: Centralizing Data

Digital transformation integrates data from multiple systems into a single platform, providing a unified source of truth for all stakeholders.

BENEFITS:

» Consolidates data from time tracking, billing and ERP systems
» Reduces manual data entry and errors
» Enables real-time reporting and better decision-making

3. AI: Advanced Analytics and Forecasting

AI tools analyze historical data, identify patterns and provide predictive insights, helping firms anticipate trends and allocate resources effectively.

BENEFITS:

» Predicts changes in client demand and market conditions
» Identifies trends that human analysts might miss
» Enhances resource allocation and profitability

SELECTING THE RIGHT SOFTWARE PLATFORM

Choosing the right software is critical to overcoming financial challenges and enabling growth. Here's what to look for:

1. Integration and Automation Features

A platform should integrate seamlessly with existing systems and automate routine tasks to improve efficiency.

LOOK FOR:

» Integration with time tracking, billing and accounting tools
» Automation for tasks like invoicing and budget updates
» Real-time data updates for accurate forecasting

2. A Familiar and Intuitive User Interface

A user-friendly platform ensures smooth adoption across departments, reducing the learning curve and boosting productivity.

LOOK FOR:

» Intuitive design that requires minimal training
» Role-based customization for tailored views
» Collaboration tools for cross-departmental teamwork
» Comprehensive onboarding support

3. Visual Dashboards and Reporting

Data visualization tools simplify complex financial data, making it easier to track key metrics and make informed decisions.

LOOK FOR:

» Customizable, real-time dashboards
» Visual tools for tracking budgets and forecasts
» Interactive reporting features for deeper insights

4. Scalability and Flexibility

As your firm grows, your software should adapt to evolving needs and handle increased data complexity.

LOOK FOR:

» Scalable solutions that grow with your firm
» Flexible features to accommodate changing processes
» Easy-to-implement upgrades and new features

MOVING FORWARD: EMBRACING TECHNOLOGY FOR GROWTH

Law firms that continue to rely on outdated systems risk falling behind. Automation, digital transformation and AI offer powerful tools to streamline financial processes, improve accuracy and unlock deeper insights into profitability. By adopting a software platform that integrates these technologies, firms can take control of their financial operations, reduce inefficiencies and set the stage for sustained growth.

The future of profitability analysis, budgeting and forecasting is data-driven, automated and powered by AI. Don't let your firm miss out on these opportunities. Start evaluating software platforms today to unlock the full potential of your financial processes and drive growth.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maya Hockley has worked with small and mid-size businesses, mid-market, and enterprise clients globally to enhance their financial planning, reporting and analytics capabilities. At Prolytics Consulting Group, Hockley focuses on connecting organizations with tailored corporate performance management solutions that optimize forecasting, budgeting and performance management.

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The Benefits of Running a Law Firm Like a Business

Administrators who enter the C-Suite are helping some firms enhance efficiency — and profitability.

BY ERIN BRERETON

"

Integrating the two C-suite positions meant that McCready, who had been handling the firm's books, case management and other efforts, could step back from those processes — a decision he says some firm leaders struggle with.."

In recent years, a number of law firms have incorporated Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and other C-suite roles, filled by administrative professionals rather than attorneys, to provide a fresh take on operations.

Many, however, haven't, according to Dan McCormack, CLM, MBA, ACC, Founder and CEO of legal business consulting firm Dan McCormack & Associates LLC.

"When it comes to a CEO title, you will see it at national and global [firms] — but still not often enough," says McCormack, who is also a member of ALA's Professional Development Advisory Committee. "The legal community is reluctant to change and very slow to adapt to new things; that thought process stems from the top."

Although firms have traditionally been helmed by attorneys, the accelerated pace of law firm closures in the past two decades has raised questions about the ideal leadership system.

Being owned and run by partners can cause law firms to spiral if departures dent profitability, according to a Yale Law School professor's analysis of firms that collapsed between 1988 and 2014. The American Lawyer's examination of 12 failed firms found amid rising costs per attorney, nearly all had amassed significant debt.

Could adopting a more corporate leadership structure be the key to law firm continuity and financial success?

TAPPING OUTSIDE EXPERTISE

Survey results published in an ALA white paper show as of 2019, 21% of law firm leaders had worked for a firm that had a CEO who was an attorney. More leaders had encountered a CEO who wasn't an attorney. They said this provided benefits such as a business-oriented perspective and allowing the managing partner and executive committee to focus on strategy.

Chicago-based personal injury firm McCready Law decided to add a Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) role and promoted a firm administrator to Chief Operating Officer (COO) as it expanded to new markets such as Indianapolis and St. Louis.

Since starting at the firm in early 2023, the CMO has spearheaded marketing and other initiatives, including the implementation of efficiency-enhancing customized AI tools. He's been so instrumental to the firm's growth, Founder and Managing Partner Michael McCready says, that his title has changed.

"He's got such a diverse background; outside of marketing, he formed his own tech businesses," McCready says. "He has been of great assistance to me in planning how we get from where we are to where we're going. He's evolved into a Chief Strategy Officer."

Integrating the two C-suite positions meant that McCready, who had been handling the firm's books, case management and other efforts, could step back from those processes — a decision he says some firm leaders struggle with.

"I saw my bandwidth was getting stretched," he says. "It's been a tremendous help. I'm not a marketer; I don't have a background in accounting or finance. I realized I had largely taken the firm as far as I could take it — and if I wanted [to] continue on this trajectory, I had to accept there are people that know how to do what I'm doing much better than I do."

> " Having an outside perspective really was a breath of fresh air … She was able to almost put a mirror in front of us and allow us to look at things differently through her lens."

A business professional can help firms perform operational tasks such as reviewing service provider costs, McCormack says, to make sure they're competitive; or design a holistic program that will ensure internal systems are being utilized to their full potential.

"From a cost perspective, you're getting a return on investment in terms of efficiency — faster document production, better network telecommunication," he says. "Lawyers can't be spending three hours analyzing a new technological process. They should be involved in the final decision, but other people should be doing that legwork."

BOOSTING THE BOTTOM LINE

The financial benefits firms may reap from bringing a C-suite professional on board can be notable. Having a Chief Financial Officer, Chief HR Officer, or Chief Information or Technology Officer strongly correlates to higher average profits per equity partner, according to a Colliers Law Firm Services Group survey of Am Law 200 law firms.

When national full-service firm CM Law decided to add a COO and Finance Director position in 2023 to help the firm strategically grow as it entered its second decade in business, the leadership team was open to hiring an administrator to fill that role, says Grant Walsh, CM Law Co-Founder, Co-Managing Partner and General Counsel.

"We thought, do we want someone that has a lot of law firm experience and could say, 'Here's what I've observed?'" Walsh says. "We also thought there are strengths from bringing someone in who's not familiar with the legal marketplace; maybe we don't want someone that [thinks] 'That's how law firms should do it' — because all we're doing is the same thing firms have always done."

After vetting candidates via a 60-question application and interviews, the firm hired a business professional with background in finance and experience dealing with lawyers on the client side — who Walsh says was able to reassess elements such as why the firm uses certain vendors.

> " **A business professional can help firms perform operational tasks such as reviewing service provider costs, McCormack says, to make sure they're competitive.** "

"That's invaluable," he says. "Having an outside perspective really was a breath of fresh air. A lot of what she did in her first year was [ask], 'Why do you do it this way? Tell me why you use this protocol.' She was able to almost put a mirror in front of us and allow us to look at things differently through her lens."

The COO and Finance Director also monitors bookkeeping, interfaces with the firm's CPAs and produces monthly data reports that highlight which initiatives are producing strong ROI and costs that could be re-examined.

"Without her eyes on the details, we would be wasting money," Walsh says. "She has really helped us to eliminate some of that waste to make sure we are making the right investments for the future of the firm."

BUSINESS STRUCTURE BEST PRACTICES

Incorporating a corporate C-suite-type role can potentially enhance a firm's daily operations; yet viewing it as an extended endeavor is critical, according to McCormack.

"The person coming in could have a lot of ideas, but the benefits are going to take a while to be recognized," he says. "[Firms need] patience and the ability to say, 'This is a five-year plan; here's where we are today — let's go down this road and see the results.' To establish a benchmark, you could allow them to handle all contracts and vendor relationships."

If a firm is trying to iron out major structural issues, though, McCready suggests possibly holding off on hiring a C-suite member.

"It should be a forward-thinking decision, and not a decision to stem the bleeding," he says. "That's not the time to drop $250,000 on a C-suite individual. You should get your firm in order so that person can elevate and bring your firm forward."

Because leadership hires may need to be in contact with multiple departments in and outside of the firm, strong communication and client service proficiencies, McCormack says, can help a candidate perform well in a C-suite role.

"You have to have that ability to adapt to the audience because you are interacting with everybody," he says. "With operational matters at a law firm, many things are involved; many communication levels, many people — you have to be able to understand all that."

With experience working in a fast-paced environment and making critical decisions, attorneys possess an admirable amount of knowledge, McCormack says. Bringing in similarly skilled analytical, marketing and other professionals can help their firm improve efficiency at essentially all levels.

"You have people who can do this — the only question is why not?" he says. "While firms make great money, maybe they're cutting themselves short in terms of long-term potential."

C-suite roles within law firms might not be the norm today; however, the move toward bringing in more business professionals from other industries, Walsh says, is picking up steam.

"If you're a five-person firm, oftentimes you'll have an office manager who's a non-lawyer," he says. "That's great in a one-firm, one-city setting — but when you're a national firm and have a footprint across multiple jurisdictions and dozens of attorneys, it makes sense to bring in a business mind to grow."

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Erin Brereton is the Owner of Chicago Journalist Media, and a freelance writer, editor and content strategist who has written about the legal industry, business, technology and other topics for 20 years.

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Setting Up New Managers for Success

Transitioning to a management role can be a challenge, but law firms can use these strategies to help their newest leaders succeed.

BY LAURA SEMKO

> " **If you are a manager, you need to first and foremost find out what motivates your people. What opportunities are they excited about, what skills do they want to develop …"**

Employees leave jobs for many factors, including lack of career growth, no work-life balance, excessive workload and bad management. In any business, a good or effective manager is pivotal to employee performance, productivity and satisfaction. This truth may apply even more so to the unique working environment of law firms, where day-to-day activities and responsibilities may often be demanding and stressful.

So what makes a good or successful manager? And how do you instill those qualities into new, first-time managers at your law firm? Let's take a look at the skills that stand out and the strategies that can help you hone them in your current and future people leaders.

QUALITIES OF A 'GOOD' MANAGER

A successful manager knows how to deftly combine two separate but interrelated competencies: management and leadership. To effectively manage at a law firm, managers need to know how to delegate tasks, keep projects on

track, think strategically and solve complex problems. But managing people also requires sound leadership skills. A good leader knows how to motivate and engage their team. They support each team member in their career development, offering opportunities for learning and recognition. Resolving conflict and building positive relationships are also integral components of an effective manager's skill set.

"A good manager takes the time to understand people on their team," says Elise Powers, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Eleview Consulting, a company that trains professionals and attorneys on core interpersonal skills. "If you are a manager, you need to first and foremost find out what motivates your people. What opportunities are they excited about, what skills do they want to develop, what is something they are struggling with right now and how can you help them? Asking them these questions shows you care and that you are invested in them."

Along with displaying top-notch competency in project management and leadership, a successful business or legal management professional needs to possess strong communication skills. The results of a recent study published in the American Journal of Management (2023) underscores this sentiment. Researchers asked more than 600 mid-level managers from the business and public education sectors which management skills were most important to completing their day-to-day responsibilities. The top skill reported was effective communication. This quality includes being an active listener.

"A legal manager needs to clearly communicate complex legal issues to both clients and staff, as well as effectively negotiate and present information," says Kevin S. Lee, JD, MDiv, Building Management Administrator for the City of San Jose and former ALA board member.

EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT FOR ALL: INTERGENERATIONAL NUANCES

Up to five generations of people are now a part of the American workplace, according to the American Psychological Association's 2024 Work in America Survey. This diverse mix of employees can spur unique opportunities and challenges for today's managers. An effective manager can recognize and adapt to generational differences in perspectives, values and communication styles.

"Younger generations like Millennials and Gen Z tend to prioritize transparency, open communication, flexibility and a focus on employee well-being in effective management," says Lee. "In contrast, older generations emphasize a more traditional hierarchical structure and focus on productivity and output."

Powers concurs. "Today's younger generations value their experience at work more so than older generations," she says. "Gen X and Boomers may have looked at their managers and thought, 'this is who I am working for and I'm going to fall in line a little bit for better or worse.' Today's young professionals want an individualized leadership approach. They want to feel understood. They value flexibility and autonomy more than prior generations, so they look for managers who create that."

Flexibility — in particular, whether in schedule or work environment (remote or hybrid) — is a significant factor in employee satisfaction today, especially for younger professionals. "Younger employees look for managers who appreciate and encourage work-life balance and look for someone who respects their time," says Lee. "What matters most is the flexibility to fulfill both their personal and professional commitments." This flexibility builds positive working relationships among managers, employees and team members.

In this respect, a successful manager will know how to balance flexibility while reinforcing job expectations. "With every generation a manager is leading, it's important to set very clear expectations for each team member while also providing context for why they exist," says Powers. "The best thing a manager can do is to be clear. Say these are the expectations. These are the non-negotiables. This is what needs to happen and outside of that, we can create flexibility for you based on what's important."

> " Younger generations like Millennials and Gen Z tend to prioritize transparency, open communication, flexibility and a focus on employee well-being in effective management."

Along with communicating job expectations well, a successful manager will know how to effectively handle another emerging trend in today's workplaces — the growing importance of mental health and wellness for employees. American workers who feel safe and comfortable expressing themselves while on the job have higher productivity and less burnout. This fact offers managers a solid opportunity to hone their leadership and communications skills while also improving their team's performance and engagement.

"Gen Z is more likely to speak up and talk openly about mental health challenges, which may be unexpected for leaders, especially those who are Boomers or Gen X who didn't grow up in an environment where that was normal," says Powers. "Leaders need to be prepared to have those conversations and to understand when something requires escalation, how to protect confidentiality and how to create a safe space."

INSTILLING CORE MANAGEMENT COMPETENCIES IN NEW MANAGERS

For any business, finding the right person to manage a team can be a challenge. First and foremost, it's important to recognize that a high-performing employee will not automatically transform into a good manager. Training is essential. You need to give new managers the knowledge, resources and support to succeed. By doing so, you will build both their confidence and their skill set.

"Firms make the mistake that leadership is intuitive and that people will naturally mold into leaders who will empower your team," says Powers. "It's this dynamic where someone was promoted because they were really good at what they were doing. That doesn't mean they are going to be a great people leader. They need training."

This training can be given in many forms, including LinkedIn Learning courses, online programs, conferences, professional development courses and interactive workshops that offer peer support and input. Mentorship

can also be instrumental. Lee encourages law firms to give younger managers the opportunities to lead projects: "Law firms can provide formal mentorship programs, offer opportunities for early leadership experiences and foster a culture of continuous learning, especially around soft skills like communication and emotional intelligence."

Holding new managers accountable for what they've learned from such training can further instill and reinforce effective management skills. For instance, Powers recommends scheduling follow-up meetings to discuss key takeaways and how best practices have been applied. This strategy allows those who participate in training to get better at navigating common problem areas for people leaders, such as how to encourage team members to take more ownership of their work, what to do if someone isn't hitting their billable hours or how to create an environment where team members feel comfortable offering ideas and expressing themselves.

"A great manager, when they get questions, helps the other person think through the problem themselves, so they develop confidence to work through problems moving forward," says Powers. "When someone comes to you with questions or wants to talk through something, give them your full attention. Ask follow-up questions and guide them to figure out a solution to the problem they are navigating."

Effective feedback — both giving and receiving — is another powerful tool that can help cultivate and support new managers and their direct reports. Providing effective feedback, whether positive or negative, requires empathy and planning. Being specific and clear can also help elicit actionable comments and input.

Powers recommends that managers directly ask their team members how they can better manage them, but to do so in a strategic, non-confrontational way. "You don't want to put someone on the spot, where they have to come up with something tangible and meaningful in half a second. Instead, ask them in advance to think about their answer to the following question: What is one thing I could do differently as a leader that would make a 10% improvement in our working relationship? Then, schedule a time to discuss their answer after they've had time to think about it."

Finally, firms need to realize that developing a good manager requires time and commitment. Instilling that same perspective and approach in a new manager will make a difference in their overall development and success as a people leader. In the end, a good manager invests time in understanding their team members, their goals and their challenges. They view it as their job to do so, remarks Powers.

Lee offers some solid final advice for law firms, including new and seasoned managers at all levels: "Every single day, imagine that your employees are volunteering to work for you. Treat them accordingly."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Laura Semko is a professional writer and editor who enjoys creating meaningful content on topics related to personal growth, health, and wellness. She has a master's degree in Writing from DePaul University. She is also a member of the American Medical Writers Association and the Editorial Freelancers Association.

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How to Protect Your Employees from All Forms of Workplace Violence

Threats, harassment and intimidation can be just as harmful as physical violence — make sure your workplace violence policy covers it all.

BY KELLY F. ZIMMERMAN

> " **"Workplace violence doesn't just involve employees ... It involves visitors, clients, even strangers."**

Intimidation. Threatening another employee. Bullying. Harassment. Did you know each of these offenses are all considered forms of workplace violence?

While some may think that workplace violence is limited to physical misconduct, this assumption is far from the truth. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, workplace violence can include myriad behaviors in different forms, including verbal and written.

"We have this idea that [violence] has to be me physically using my body to violate your body in some way, and we don't talk about insidious behavior as violence," says Lauren Howard, Chief Executive Officer of LBee Health, a mental health practice providing support services for those coping with or recovering from toxic work environments and burnout.

For example, both microaggressions (like subtle verbal digs or insults) and macroaggressions, which can include more institutional forms of discrimination, can be just as harmful to an employee as being pushed or hit by a colleague. "These are acts of violence because you're losing your safety," Howard says.

The consequences of violence within the workplace can be severe, as the Department of Labor suggests. Aside from physical and psychological harm to the victim, their colleagues may also suffer. Workplaces may also have to grapple with loss of productivity and morale, increased security and workers' compensation costs, employee absences, legal fees, PR issues, and in severe instances, even death.

For all these reasons, having a workplace violence policy in place can be instrumental in protecting both your employees and organization. That policy can also be used as a resource to help guide internal responses and protocol, while also demonstrating to employees that your organization cares about keeping them safe.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR YOUR WORKPLACE VIOLENCE POLICY

There are templates available from organizations like the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) that law firms can reference when building their workplace violence policy, but even if you use one, you will probably need to modify it to accommodate your own office. Considerations like your work environment, whether there are building visitors, and types of potential threats can all play a role what you should include, says Adam Burkholder, SPHR, Director of Workplace Violence Prevention for the University of California, Davis.

"Workplace violence doesn't just involve employees," Burkholder says. "It involves visitors, clients, even strangers. There are all kinds of different interactions that can lead to a workplace violence incident."

Burkholder says there are numerous variables that may impact what goes into your policy, even with a template in hand. To help get you started, here are five key items to consider including in your workplace violence policy.

1. Workplace Violence Definitions

An organization can't effectively enforce a workplace violence policy without establishing a clear definition of what counts as "workplace violence," Burkholder says. Does your policy only cover physical violence, or as Howard mentioned, are you looking to incorporate bullying and harassment, as well?

Defining workplace violence can also help outline the different types of incidents you may encounter and need to respond to under the policy, such as employee-on-employee, client-on-employee or stranger-on-employee.

2. Reporting Procedures

Employees should know who they can tell and trust when an incident arises, but reporting procedures are important for both the reporter and the employer to help ensure the incident is properly documented, investigated and handled. "You can't respond properly if you don't have a policy," Howard says, "but also, your employees can't escalate things or rely on a standard response if you don't have those things in place."

3. State-Level Compliance

In addition to guidelines companies need to follow from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), your state may also have specific requirements when it comes to enforcing workplace violence prevention and training. States like California and New York are examples of jurisdictions that have proactively responded to concerns around workplace violence, so ensuring that your company complies with local and federal law is key.

4. Anti-Retaliation Verbiage

With the creation of a workplace violence policy, it's just as important to address the psychological safety of employees as well as the physical, Howard says. This means creating a policy that encompasses all ways employees can be harmed on the job. This can include employee retaliation, which can contribute to an unsafe work environment for reporters of workplace violence.

For this reason, it's important to include anti-retaliation language in your workplace violence policy. Not only can it help to normalize reporting, as Burkholder has seen with his own organization, but it can also help to provide employees with a sense of security around reporting misconduct in the workplace.

" **Creating a workplace violence policy isn't just about legal compliance — it's about creating a safe environment for employees, clients and the people who associate with your business."**

5. **Training Requirements**

Incorporating organization-wide training requirements can help raise awareness and provide critical information around reporting and responding to workplace violence, recognizing problematic behavior in the workplace and promoting personal safety. It can even help with de-escalation and violence prevention.

THE IMPACT OF A SOLID WORKPLACE VIOLENCE POLICY

Creating a workplace violence policy isn't just about legal compliance — it's about creating a safe environment for employees, clients and the people who associate with

your business. But most importantly, having a clear enforceable workplace violence policy in place sends a message about your company's values and your willingness to protect those who work for you — both from physical and psychological violence.

"If your employer does not support you, or you're not certain they're going to support you when somebody you worked with physically harms you, that is a hopeless situation for most people," Howard says. "They lose all hope of ever developing a safe relationship with this workplace."

Kelly F. Zimmerman is a former Managing Editor of *Legal Management* and has extensive experience covering the legal industry for organizations such as Northwestern's Pritzker School of Law and Axiom Law. She earned a Master of Science in Journalism from Northwestern University.

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AI-Driven Deepfakes Are Targeting the Legal Industry

Legal administrators should take several crucial steps to protect their firms from attacks stemming from fake audio and video clips.

BY ERIC HOFFMASTER
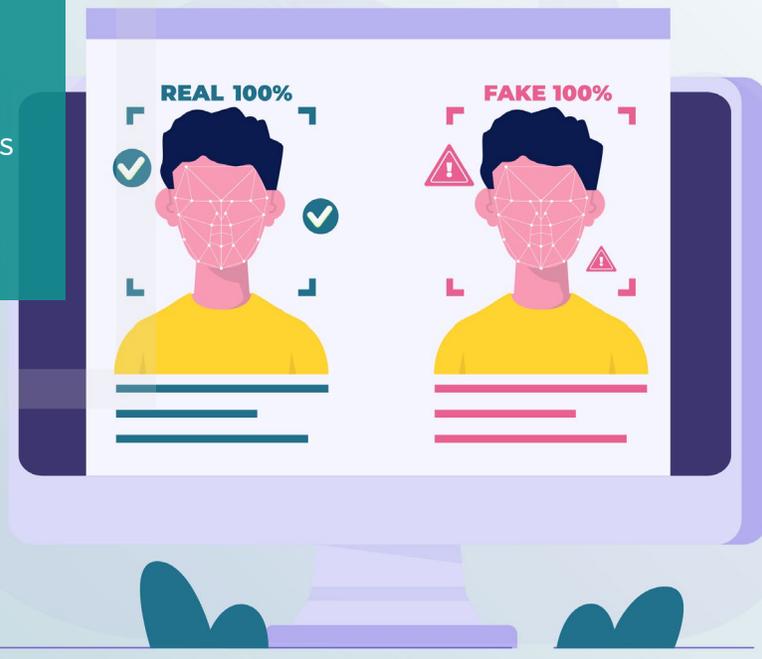
> " A policy alone won't keep you safe. Educate staff about the risks and indicators of deepfake technology."

Deepfakes have become increasingly prevalent in our society, and that should worry everyone in the legal industry. These doctored media clips can be used very effectively to execute cyberattacks and other misleading campaigns to help bad actors.

Deepfakes are sophisticated fabrications of audio or video that are nearly indistinguishable from reality. These fabrications can mimic a person's appearance, voice and mannerisms, making it challenging to discern their authenticity. While deepfakes can be used for entertainment and humor, they can also be employed to deceive, manipulate and exploit.

The private and confidential nature of the legal industry increases the danger and impact of deepfakes and the likelihood of targeted deepfake attacks.

Law firm administrators must stay vigilant against deepfake attacks to protect their firm, their clients and staff. This article provides legal administrators with practical strategies for identifying and mitigating deepfake attacks.

IDENTIFYING DEEPFAKE AUDIO AND VIDEO

There are several indicators and tools that can help determine deepfakes.

1. Visual Inconsistencies

Deepfake videos often exhibit subtle visual anomalies that distinguish them from authentic videos. These include unnatural eye movements, inconsistent lighting and shadows, blurred or distorted facial features, and irregular blinking patterns. When someone is speaking, watch the muscles in the face and mouth to make sure they match the words. Look for sudden, jerky or unnatural motion. Closely scrutinize videos for these signs, especially in important or high-stakes scenarios where authenticity is critical.

2. Audio Irregularities

Like deepfake videos, deepfake audio often has inconsistencies. Common red flags include unnatural pauses, irregular speech patterns and background noise inconsistencies. These irregularities may be very subtle and undetectable by ear. Using specialized software to analyze audio spectrograms can help identify these anomalies.

3. Deepfake Detection Tools

Several tech solutions have been developed to assist in identifying deepfakes. These tools employ artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning to analyze content and attempt to identify its authenticity. Using deepfake detection tools can aid in verifying authenticity, but they are not 100% accurate. Some detectors are better than others in validating authenticity depending on the type of deepfake content they are analyzing, so using multiple tools is recommended when assessing critical content.

4. Cross-Checking Content

In many cases, authentic content has a digital footprint that can be referenced to help validate its authenticity. If a video or audio clip is questionable, do an internet search to see if that content is already online. You may find social media posts, blogs or articles referencing the content as authentic or fake.

PROTECTING LAW FIRMS AND STAFF

The most important means to keep firms safe are creating policies and educating staff. Here are specific steps to help protect yourself:

1. Create a policy.

Coming up with a firmwide policy lets staff know the importance of combating deepfakes and specifically how to act to keep the firm and its clients safe. A good policy should include particular scenarios where deepfake attacks are likely, such as money transfers, purchases and requests for information, as well as explicit steps employees should take to validate the authenticity of the request before acting. Consider expanding existing cybersecurity policies to include deepfake detection.

2. Establish clear verification procedures.

Develop simple and straightforward procedures for verifying the authenticity of audio and video content and include these in the policy. Establish protocols for cross-referencing information, consulting multiple sources and using technological tools to analyze content. Define an escalation process for when someone has identified a potential attack, covering what to do and which people to notify.

3. Educate staff.

A policy alone won't keep you safe. Educate staff about the risks and indicators of deepfake technology. Train them on the common scenarios and actions to take. A good training plan should include practical exercises and real-world examples to reinforce learning. Conduct regular training sessions to raise awareness and equip employees with the knowledge and skills needed to identify and respond to deepfakes.

4. Test your staff.

Build on your training foundation with regular deepfake testing. Consider engaging a professional organization to test your staff by initiating safe, harmless deepfake attacks and gauge their adherence to policy and training. If any of your staff fall prey to these attacks, provide them with additional training to reinforce the right behavior.

5. Collaborate with cybersecurity experts.

Partnering with cybersecurity experts can provide valuable insights and support in defending against deepfake threats. These experts can assist in developing and implementing advanced detection and mitigation strategies, as well as furnishing ongoing monitoring and threat assessment services.

6. Keep abreast of technological advancements.

Deepfake technology is evolving and improving at a rapid pace. Staying informed about the latest developments is essential for maintaining effective defenses. Law firm administrators should regularly review industry publications, attend relevant conferences and workshops and participate in professional networks to keep up to date on emerging trends and best practices.

By understanding how to identify deepfake audio and video and implementing comprehensive protective measures, law firm administrators can safeguard their firms and staff from these digital deceptions. Through vigilance, education and collaboration, law firms can stay ahead of these threats and maintain the integrity and trust essential to their practice.

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Leveraging AI to Manage Cost, Mitigate Risk and Enhance Compliance

AI tools will enable legal administrators to achieve even greater financial oversight.

BY NISHAT MEHTA
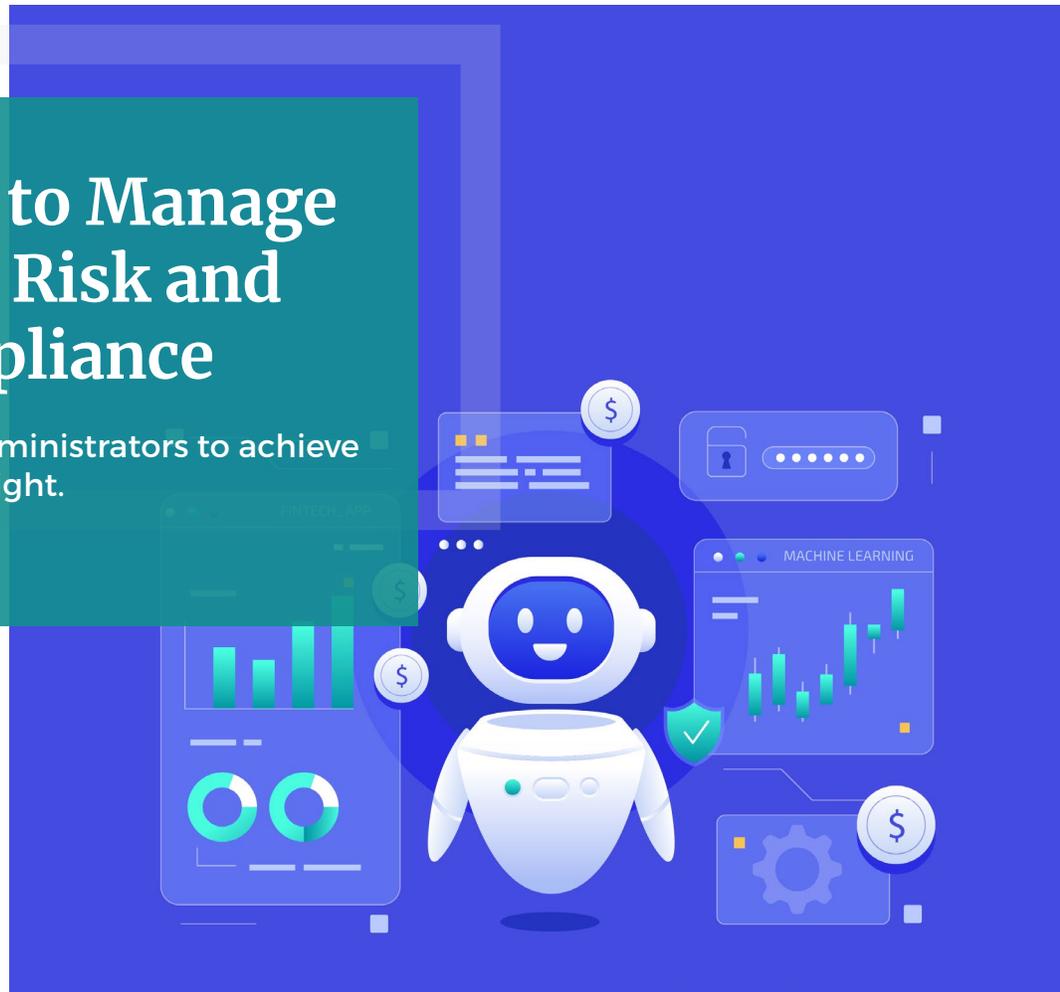
" **Effective use of AI rests on leveraging its potential to improve efficiency while maintaining the critical human touch necessary to guard against inappropriate use of this technology.** "

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into legal practice is no longer a distant concept — it's happening now. Over the past few years, software solutions powered by AI have been reshaping routine tasks such as data entry, appointment setting and client intake. These innovations are significantly reducing both time and costs for law firms of all sizes.

For more complex tasks, AI-powered solutions — such as those leveraging natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning — offer distinct advantages. The advent of large language models (LLMs) enables improved consumption of text as opposed to just numbers, making AI even better suited for the legal industry. These systems seamlessly sift through vast volumes of legal documents, statutes and case law, extracting key insights to enhance precision and streamline decision-making for attorneys.

While the advancements brought to the practice of law by AI are undeniable, legal professionals and administrators must balance the opportunities these solutions present with the need for proper oversight. Effective use of AI rests

on leveraging its potential to improve efficiency while maintaining the critical human touch necessary to guard against inappropriate use of this technology. Only then will legal teams be enabled to harness AI's full potential.

MANAGING COST

Legal administrators and law firm leaders play a critical role in managing resources to ensure the firm delivers high-quality client service while maintaining long-term financial sustainability. Costs related to technology, personnel and daily operations are under constant scrutiny. For in-house administrators, the responsibility is often even greater, particularly when it comes to justifying the return on investment (ROI) for new technology. The effort to encourage a value-driven approach to decision-making typically falls to administrative professionals. Fortunately, AI is proving to be one of the most effective solutions to achieving these goals.

Last year showed us that AI-powered solutions already are automating time-consuming tasks such as billing, document review and case management, significantly cutting administrative overhead. This year, more widespread adoption of AI tools will enable legal administrators to achieve even greater financial oversight. For example, AI systems can analyze time entries and invoices to ensure accuracy, flag inconsistencies and identify potential overbilling errors. Predictive analytics will further empower legal teams to forecast project or case-related costs with greater accuracy, improving budgeting and resource allocation.

Staffing often is the most significant cost challenge for administrators, particularly in high-volume practices. AI-powered workforce solutions can revolutionize staffing processes by offering real-time insights into staffing needs and workload distribution. These solutions help administrators optimize resource allocation, ensuring the right tasks are assigned to the right people while avoiding costly overstaffing or underutilization. This strategic approach not only helps control costs but also enhances operational efficiency and service quality.

MITIGATING RISK

Artificial intelligence increasingly is becoming indispensable for risk management across the legal profession. AI-driven solutions designed for legal research already are expediting processes by sifting through large volumes of case law, statutes and contracts, reducing the time and expense associated with manual research. What's new in 2025 is more reliance on

contract management systems using NLP to help identify and mitigate risks, ensuring compliance and preventing costly disputes. Automating tedious tasks like monitoring expiring contracts allows legal administrators and paralegals to focus on higher-priority responsibilities.

Like contract management systems, AI-powered deposition summaries also will change the way legal administrators work. By incorporating state-of-the-art LLMs with advanced NLP capabilities, practitioners now have a more accurate and nuanced understanding of long-narrative formats. Harnessing the power of these AI solutions enables legal teams to quickly grasp critical themes or pinpoint key details buried within complex deposition narratives. These tools not only improve efficiency but also enhance the strategic value of the insights derived.

Both tools mitigate risk and create efficiencies for law firm administrators and their corporate counterparts. By eliminating error-prone routine tasks, administrators can focus on the big-picture priorities that otherwise might be sacrificed in the blur of daily litigation and complex corporate transactions, such as training and continuing legal education (CLE) compliance, team building and human resources tasks, or having extra time to manage month-end or year-end processes.

ENHANCING COMPLIANCE

Compliance is another area where legal administrators can look to technology to help firms meet regulatory requirements with greater accuracy. Secure, encrypted environments powered by AI are lending a hand in managing sensitive data while adhering to industry-specific regulations, such as HIPAA for healthcare-related cases. Centralized AI-powered document tracking systems are another significant innovation. These systems allow legal administrators to monitor the progress of record requests, ensuring clear documentation and proper audit trails, which ease compliance with legal and procedural standards.

Beyond day-to-day compliance tasks, corporate compliance professionals and legal administrators must navigate the dual challenges of adopting AI responsibly while managing new compliance challenges. With the rising complexity of legal data and regulatory demands, there is a growing need for platforms that provide real-time updates and analysis of legal and regulatory changes. While most of these regulation-focused AI solutions are still in the nascent stage of development, legal professionals will need them to remain compliant and make informed decisions. For example, AI-driven tools could help organizations navigate complex regulatory landscapes by identifying emerging compliance issues and recommending remedial actions.

GAINING A COMPETITIVE EDGE

AI's ability to enable predictive analytics and trend forecasting is revolutionizing decision-making in legal administration. By reducing dependence on manual, labor-intensive work, administrators gain the time they need to focus on strategies that drive growth and improve profitability. Automated systems also ensure greater accuracy, boosting confidence in data-driven decisions.

Leveraging AI in areas such as cost management, risk mitigation and compliance will both enhance efficiency and position legal organizations to maintain a competitive edge in an increasingly demanding landscape. For legal administrators, the future is bright; with AI as an ally, they can focus on advancing their firms' strategic goals while ensuring exceptional service for clients.

Ultimately, adopting AI now is no longer optional for law firms — it is essential for long-term success. By responsibly equipping their teams with these cutting-edge tools, legal administrators are investing in a future where efficiency, precision and innovation define their practice.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

With a diverse career spanning leadership roles across legal services, data analytics, and business intelligence, **Nishat Mehta,** Chief Executive Officer of Lexitas, drives growth and innovation to deliver exceptional service to the legal industry.

Supporting Your Employees' Mental Health Needs

When your employees are working remotely, it's important to find unique ways to keep everyone connected.

BY DEBORAH E. MCGEE
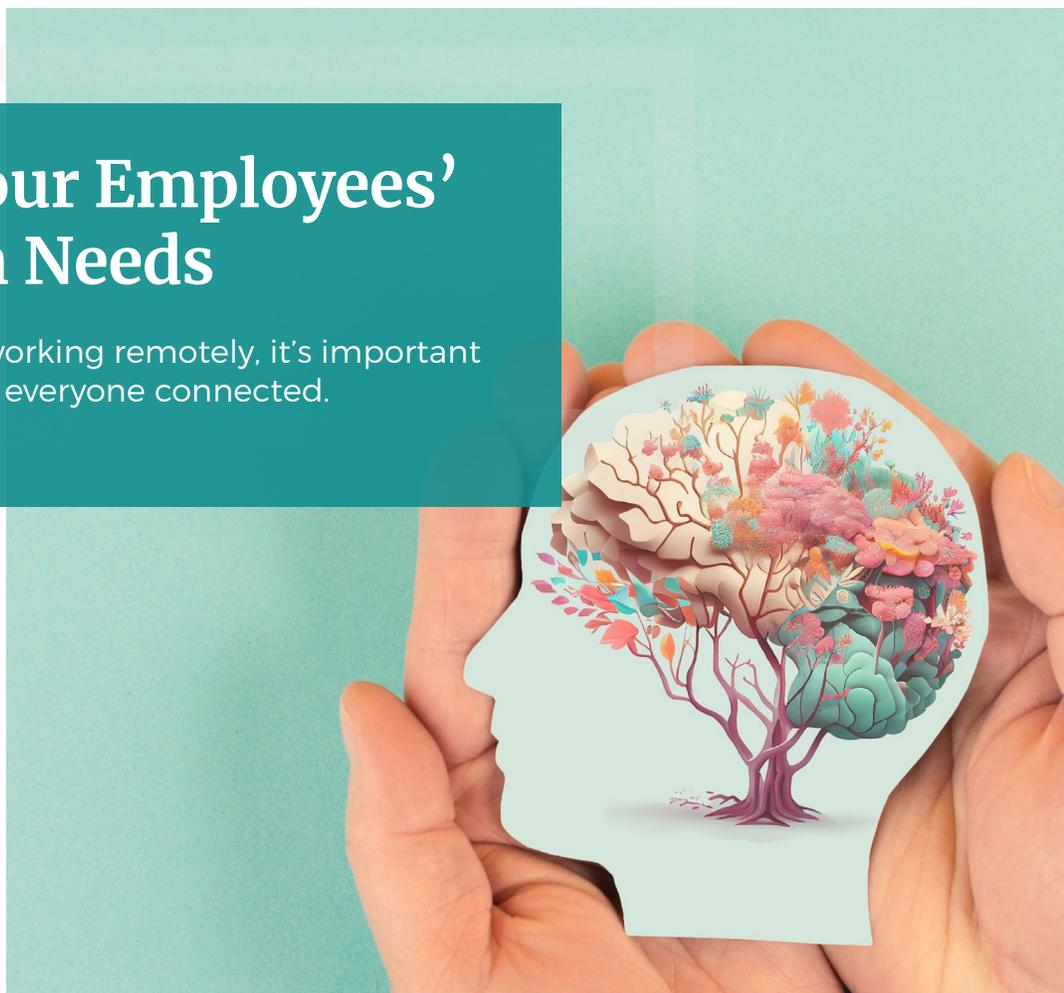
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Having a fun "sharing" experience with your employees is a great way to ensure their mental health and connectivity is your first priority."

The COVID pandemic introduced many changes to the world of employment: permanent remote work arrangements, constant on-camera meetings with clients and colleagues, and being glued to a computer screen when you are alone in a room.

What does this radical new work environment do to the mental health of your employees? For law firm leaders, it's often hard for them to determine the impact. Think about it: Pre-COVID, you could pick up on clues that something just wasn't quite right with an employee. Perhaps they seemed quieter than normal. Perhaps their physical appearance was just a little off. Maybe they weren't smiling or laughing as much as they used to, or they seemed to be a bit edgy for no reason. These clues were rather obvious because you physically saw your employees every day in the office.

But post-COVID, when employees are working remotely, and unless you intentionally "ping" them on your meetings app, you may go days without actually seeing them. Those times are only for snippets anyway, and often they may not be on camera. So how do you most effectively check in on the mental

health of your employees in a post-COVID world? Especially when it comes to attorneys, or other legal specialists who may work very independently?

CONNECTING ACROSS THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Like everything else in the post-COVID world, intentionality becomes the main point. You have to be intentional in your reach and your demeanor. Nothing has slowed down in the world; as a matter of fact, it has sped up. Because now we can have 10 meetings in a 10-hour day and talk with people all over the world, it has given us the false sense of security that we are "in touch" with our employees, no matter where they are in the world.

Being truly in touch with them is true if you are purposeful about what you are picking up on … more than words. Having a fun "sharing" experience with your employees is a great way to ensure their mental health and connectivity is your first priority. It is very easy to move from task to task, especially where billable hours are being recorded. It is important to occasionally step away from the usual day-to-day hustle, to relate with employees on a personal basis. Ask them about their favorite team song, or use the "wear your college jersey" day you used to do as a fun activity on camera with your employees, and let them talk about it. This might only require 15 minutes; the casework can wait!

Ask them to bring their favorite coffee mug to a team meeting and ask them to share why it is. Being intentional about knowing what is going on with your remote employees is so important and a quick and easy thing to do.

People still want to be connected and still want to talk about themselves. During a meeting, start it with a "safety brief" — yes, we still need to be safe, even in our own homes — or share a quick mental break exercise each of them can do, just to stretch their minds.

There is still a lot of connectivity that can happen with remote employees, but we have to be intentional and passionate about connecting and authentic about our intent for your employees. Wherever they may be around the world, they need to know they are important, in a safe environment within your organization, and that you do care about them and their family.

I often hear my team members say, "I am so much more productive when I am working remotely." There is a time and place for being alone, and yes, I can think clearer and stay more focused if I'm not bombarded by constant client requests, meetings and interruptions. But to do it all day, every day, would be very stressful for me. I need human connection, and I know my team members do as well.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Deborah E. McGee is the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of PZI Group. The author of *The Leadership Attitude: Inspiring Success through Authenticity and Passion,* she is recognized as an HR innovator. McGee spent 13 years as a consultant with Big Four global accounting firms and a decade in international human resources and global mobility management roles.

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