

ZEN AND THE ART OF LEGAL NETWORKING

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INSIGHTS & COMMENTARY ON
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Law Firm of the Future: Are You Ready?

BY LINDSAY GRIFFITHS ON NOVEMBER 22, 2016



We've spent several weeks addressing the potential characteristics that the lawyers and law firms of the future will require in order to be successful. Today, we look at the last two contributors to [High Q's book on Smart Law](#) and the Law Firm of the Future, but I invite all of you to continue to consider these issues and discuss them – particularly give some thought to whether the contributors missed anything you see as essential to law firms in the future and where you see our profession headed.

And what's next? We've been looking at sort of where we'll be in five or ten years, but not what the incremental steps will be to get there. So what is the first thing that firms and lawyers need to be doing in order to prepare themselves to be an effective law firm of the future? Is it embracing new technologies? Is it a shift in mindset at the leadership levels of the firm (or is that already happening)? Is it bringing in strong teams of professionals, not just lawyers? Are all of those things already taking place to some extent at many firms, and we just need to accelerate them?

What's next?

Before we get there, let's look at what our final two contributors had to say about the future of law firms, which reinforces much of what we've already heard throughout this series.

V. Mary Abraham: We need to be Trilingual

I was introduced to V. Mary Abraham in the early days of Twitter and she's always been forward-thinking in our profession. V. Mary Abraham a law firm consultant, strategic facilitator, knowledge management thought leader, and co-founder of [Broadli Inc.](#), which created the Broadli generosity app and provides smarter networking training. She writes on law firm and knowledge management issues at [Above and Beyond KM](#).

She believes that in order to be successful in the future, law firms and lawyers will have to be trilingual – and she's not speaking about linguistics expertise. She says lawyers will have to be experts in the law, which is typically what firms have focused on in the past, but also in speaking “client” and “technology.” What does that mean?



Speaking ‘client’ means the ability to hear what your client is telling you and to interpret those words from the perspective of that client rather than merely from the perspective of that client’s outside counsel. This empathetic knowledge goes way beyond Google Translate (if, in fact, Google Translate could handle it!) to a deep understanding of the needs and aspirations behind the words. This is a language you learn best by being the client or by walking in the client’s shoes for many miles.”

There are already a number of lawyers who know how to do this well, and it's definitely a differentiator. But Abraham is saying that it's going to become more of a requirement in the future. Whereas lawyers used to be able to say that their expertise made them different from other lawyers and law firms, now it's what gets them a seat at the table. Similarly, a deep understanding of their clients and how to meet their clients' needs (in the context of the company, not just the individual that you're dealing with), will be a minimum requirement in the future. Will you be ready?

The third table leg in this trilingual triad is speaking “technology.”



Speaking ‘technology’ means more than just operating digitally. It means understanding the array and logic of the digital resources available. It means an openness to rethinking the way you work so that you can take advantage of the rich possibilities of those digital resources. And, above all, it means being willing to create safe-fail experiments that allow you to try new things as you explore novel ways of working. Without this willingness to experiment, you can never improve and you most certainly will not speak technology well.”

Abraham touches on some of the other requirements that we’ve looked at in previous posts, the willingness to be open-minded, forward-thinking, and curious, as well as a need for strong leadership. She is also quick to point out that this trilinguism is not limited to lawyers, but will have to permeate throughout all the professionals of the law firm, which is something else we’ve discussed. Firms will need strong talent across the board, not just among their legal professionals, and we will all need to understand these three tenets of doing business effectively to best serve our clients as legal professional services organizations.

Ryan McClead: Here Comes the Industrial Revolution of Law

Ryan McClead is the business transformation and innovation architect at [HighQ](#). He is a 2015 FastCase 50 recipient – honoring 50 “entrepreneurs, innovators, and trailblazers... who have charted a new course for the delivery of legal services” – and he is a regular contributor to the popular [3 Geeks and a Law Blog](#).

McClead unpacks the initial question that HighQ posed into three deeper questions:

- What is the future of legal services?
- What do lawyers need to do to prepare for this future?
- What do law firms need to do to prepare for this future?

In various ways, all of the contributors to HighQ’s book have answered these three questions. McClead tells us that “We are entering the Legal equivalent of the Industrial Revolution and those firms that stick with the tried and true, because it has always worked in the past, will eventually find that they cannot compete.” That’s something that many of us in the legal industry are familiar with – “change or die,” right? So what does McClead suggest we do?

His future of legal services includes three broad trends – Automation, Design, and Productization, to which he adds “The future of legal services will be designed by legal designers, automated by legal engineers, and

productized by legal product managers.” This illustrates previous contributors’ suggestions that lawyers alone will not drive the future law firm, but will need to work collaboratively with a number of other professionals in order to be successful.

In terms of how lawyers should prepare for the future, McClead says:

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The three roles I mention above are all lawyers slash something else. I don’t think an understanding of the law on its own will be sufficient for most lawyers to be successful in this new world. Undoubtedly, there will always be a few gurus around for subject matter expertise, but the majority of lawyers will be using their legal knowledge to design, build, or manage new legal products and services for use by clients, consumers, or other lawyers.”

That again reinforces what a number of contributors have said, including Abraham and her comments on the need for trilinguism. The law and understanding of the law is essential. But it’s the minimum and not the threshold, and so lawyers and law firms are being asked to be and do more to be successful in the future.

As for law firms, McClead says:

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Law firms need to invest in the development of their legal talent to help them expand their knowledge and skills. They need to work closely and directly with clients to truly understand their legal needs, and to be more proactive in the delivery of those services. They need to begin to transition from a world of manual legal labor to a world full of legal engines.”

We’ve discussed before that the future of legal services will still be about its people, and that’s absolutely true. But clients are asking their law firms to be and do more. So firms will have to invest more in their people, and the talent that we see at firms is going to be made up of more than lawyers. We’re already seeing that at a number of firms, and this will only accelerate in the future.

So what’s next? Are you ready?

If you’ve missed any of the posts in this series, here is the full roundup:

- [The Right Way to be a Lawyer of the Future](#)

- [The Law Firm of the Future Will Need a Perfect Storm](#)
- [Law Firm of the Future: Move it or Lose It](#)
- [Law Firm of the Future: It's About the People](#)
- [Law Firm of the Future: Get Ready to Change](#)
- [Law Firm of the Future: Deeper Discussions Sought Here](#)

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