

Issue 9

Unkind, Unpredictable, Ungodly

So long, farewell,
auf wiedersehen,
goodnight LawLawLand!



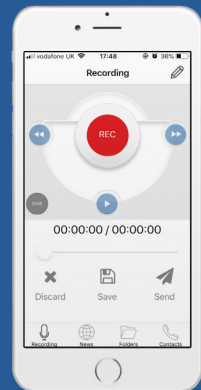
TECHNOLOGY IN

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Meet the Tech Ambassadors



Chrissie Lightfoot
Chair and
Chief Tech Advisor



Suchet Amin
(aka Such)
CEO and Founder, inCase



Jeroen Versteijne
Legal Tech Expert,
Betty Blocks



Martyn Best
Managing Director,
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David Wybourne
Head of Legal AI,
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Adam Pope
CEO, Spencer Churchill



Priscilla Sinder
Director, Property
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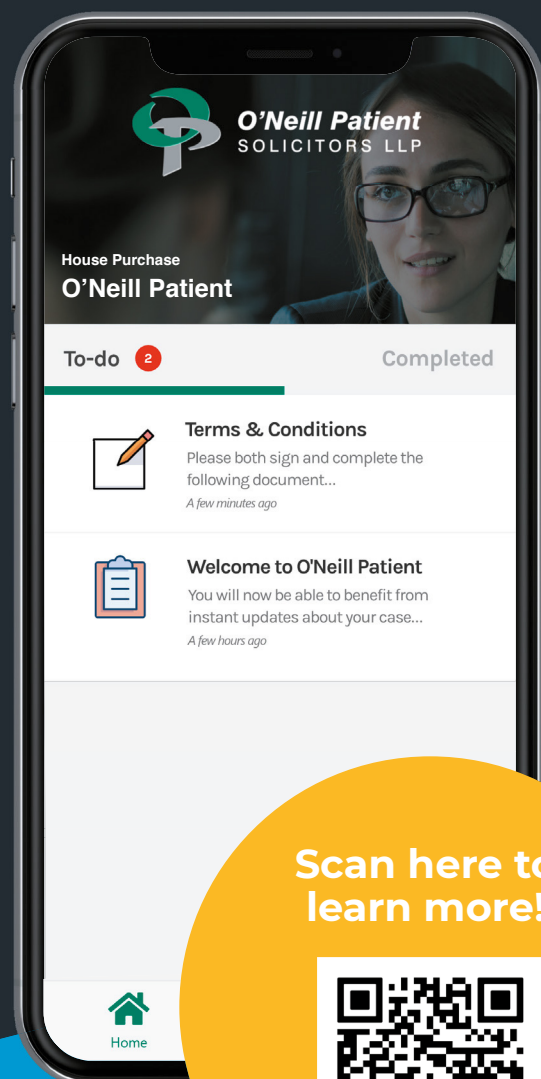
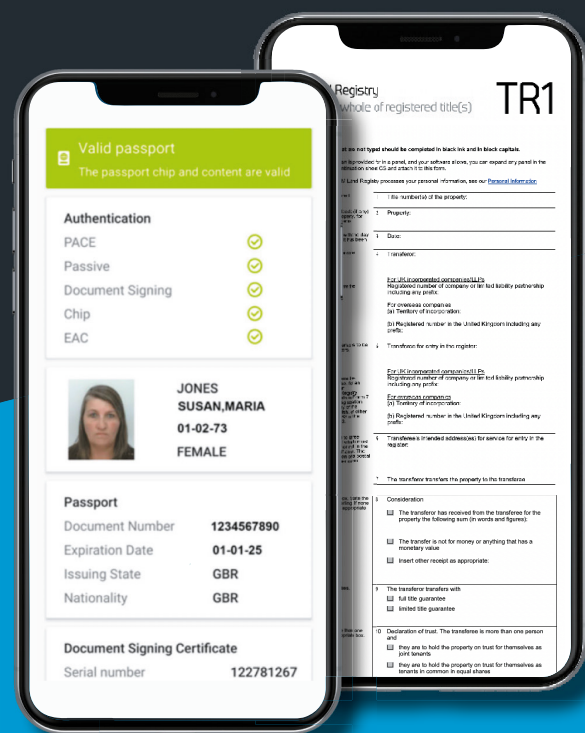


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Office

Welcome

Signing along to The Sound of Music, “so-long, farewell, auf wiedersehen, goodnight”, *The Naked Lawyer* dances gracefully with suitcase, hat, sunglasses in hand and a pristine copy of War and Peace tucked neatly into her utility belt where the foray of muse bombs usually nestle. There isn’t a woman alive who succeeds so well in attracting such attention when exiting a room...

Yep, you guessed it, she’s left us all to get on with it at work over the ‘summer of discontent’ as she jets off in search of a cooler climate for a prolonged and well-deserved break from Lightfoot Towers UK; myself and it currently perspiring and sweltering respectively in 40-degree heat. *gasps* I envy you readers with your September rain and cool temperatures!!

Void of our muse, we glance at each other furtively, all sat shuffling our feet, with arms stretched as we wave her off whilst Martyn slams the door emphatically behind her.

“Glad she’s gone”, he jokes, breaking the silence to lighten the mood... *chuckles* *guffaws* *grins*...

We knew exactly what he meant.

None of us were in the mood to be sprayed with a plethora of smoking muse bombs in this stifling heat!! But we were also incredibly sad that she would not be around to entertain and inspire us in her trademark fashion.

For a wee little thing she wields an awful lot of influence, her absence already having an effect on our usual lively roundtable proceedings; such a vivacious, cheeky, dominant bundle of energy who lights up the room wherever she appears - metaphorically and literally. How are we ever going to get through this meeting without her?

Armed with copious jugs of iced water and fat rascals at the ready on the roundtable (a Yorkshire biscuit delicacy, not chubby members of the TiLLL team, I hasten to add), I pour us all a cooling beverage and hand the plate of cookies around as I contemplate how much I am going to miss her. Omnipresent, only when she is truly gone, do I realise and acknowledge the impact she has on me...all of us, actually... Hmmm...

Raising my crystal-clear glass with ice cubes clinking in the air to salute her departure, I look at each of the tech ambassadors affectionately and say: “Well, I, for one, am not glad she’s gone. I will miss her dreadfully as I’m sure you will too. But I guess we’ll just have to do what everyone else does. Adapt. We will survive. This, I am certain of. Heck, who knows, we might even surprise ourselves and thrive during this session, ladies and gents” *winks to all* *smiles* *nods*...



Volatility

Now there's a thought, what an apt theme this would make for today's gathering. There's been so much stuff, aka 'outside influence', affecting and disrupting our lives, careers and companies these past two years and currently, and no doubt a whole lot more in the future to come, it would be hugely beneficial to discuss how people and businesses have adapted in dealing with change overnight and are now better prepared for 2023 and beyond. How have they succeeded, or are more likely to succeed? What, where, when and how can we be ready to succeed, survive and thrive in whatever the world (nature/climate/COVID), or tyrants (Putin), throw at us? How do we cope with circumstances that produce an imbalance in our carefully crafted strategies and plans and at the same time steer ourselves through the continually volatile market conditions?

Although the COVID-19 pandemic catapulted people, corporations, and nations globally into unknown territory, further uncertainties remain. Climate change is an increasingly pervasive threat to all societies. Geopolitical frictions and fractures across nations are disrupting supply chains worldwide. The looming impacts of the "great resignation" are daunting, not just because of the investment needed in added recruitment and training, but also the general disruption to operations and the alarming shortage of talent. People management, change management and digital inclusion have become priorities as businesses adapt to changing market dynamics, operational and stakeholder pressures.

Which causes me to wonder how can resilience be built into business models to maintain profitability, retain talent, and support business growth amid the potential political and economic storms ahead? In the face of a global scarcity of talent and computer chips, cost of living, fuel and energy crises in Europe, spiralling interest rates with inflation running rife – and then potentially stagflation and deflation on the horizon – plus a potential recession imminent here in the UK and other nations, how can law firms and companies best maximise their resources?

Evidently, to steer a viable, feasible, and sustainable law firm or business in today's unkind, unpredictable, and ungodly (or so it seems) world, leaders must stay ahead of technology, business, consumer and economic trends, adapt to macroeconomic factors and be set up to navigate sudden, and predictable, disruptions.

So, let's discuss shall we ...

As we live in a world with rapidly developing and occurring geo, political, social, technological, and economic issues, from huge forest fires and wars to global debates about abortion rights and changing legislation, the requirements for legal services and support are constantly changing...

How can firms ensure they respond quickly and stay flexible in such a volatile world?

David: Are they rapidly developing? While situations may escalate quickly, they're rarely surprising and are normally signposted well in advance. I think we all must stand up and be counted. State your position early. Clients and prospective clients will be drawn to this position.

David Wybourne

Head of Legal AI,
Cloud Business



Then it's about ensuring you have open channels for communication to interact with your clients' opinions, thoughts and needs. While your relationship with your clients is key to promoting that conversation and debate, technology can also help create a collaborative and inclusive environment to build those relationships.

Martyn: We always have volatility in our world, that's the constant. It doesn't always affect us in the short term, but eventually most things have an impact some way or another. So, law firms may not need to react to every issue that is happening in the world, but I guess the watch word is AWARENESS, which has to be a key quality in any landscape.

General intellectual curiosity of what is happening around us, a willingness to question and to try to model the impact of external influences to our current comfortable world is vital.

Remove complacency from your viewpoint, and don't think that the current stability and harmony will last long. Something will always come along to disturb the status quo – some of those critters we will embrace and enjoy, and some will be very unwelcome and we will resist and avoid their existence until we need to do something, or sure as eggs one of our competitors will and then our lovely harmony will be threatened.

So, in a nutshell, be watchful, and don't be afraid of change.

Jeroen: In today's business landscape, firms must be able to pivot and change focus quickly, deal with an influx of clients and requests, and learn to provide new types of services. Firms don't just need any LegalTech – they need solutions which:

- Map exactly onto the business and clients' needs;
- Can be adjusted and changed;
- Grow with the business as tech familiarity increases and needs become more complex.

There are various issues that come with off-the-shelf digital solutions. These pre-established applications are restrictive, built as a one-size-fits-all solution. This means that a firm eventually, and inevitably, runs into limitations of the technology that isn't built to fit exact needs, and adjustments cannot be made. A firm then faces a decision of sticking with a subpar solution, or making a huge investment into fully rebuilding a solution or onboarding new technology. The result: spending resources on the same problem and losing impact in the meantime.

Instead, the best way for a firm to ensure they stay flexible in a volatile world is through a LegalTech stack that enables agility and speed. And the tool which is designed for this exact purpose? A low-code / no-code (LCNC) platform which empowers users to build powerful, limitless, flexible LegalTech solutions. LCNC technology is built for speed, and is based on development cycles which are short, agile, and iterative. Applications are built as MVPs within days and launched



Jeroen Versteijne
Legal Tech Expert,
Betty Blocks

Flexibility

as full applications within weeks. LCNC development, thus, provides all of the speed without any of the limitations of off-the-shelf solutions.

For example: Betty Block's no-code and low-code capabilities mean never running into technological limitations. Instead, our platforms support all types of users to develop rapidly and easily. Additionally, by combining our industry knowledge and no-code development expertise, we have established over forty proven use cases. There are applications which either automate and optimise internal processes, or provide self-serve solutions to elevate the customer experience. By taking a use-case approach, law firms can get started immediately and reach business value quickly. This is further enabled by our wide array of validated templates, which are fully customisable and can be continually updated and changed. Using our templates, firms can kick-start their development and build an application based on current needs, which is rapidly adjustable to future needs, new insights, or changing regulations.

Priscilla, what are your thoughts in relation to this question? I know you have a view about alternative business structures ("ABS") and 'expertise' per se. Can you share it with us please?

Priscilla: Since the introduction of ABS against the backdrop of the Legal Services Act 2007 ("Act") law firms now benefit from expertise from many disciplines. The advantages of an ABS are:

1. Raising equity by potential business parties and allowing new investment to be attracted from different markets.
2. Greater employees buy-in; non-solicitors can be rewarded by being appointed to the top position in a workplace and creating new ideas based on innovation, which may not be necessarily at the forefront of a solicitor's mind.
3. Diversification - this has opened the path for multidisciplinary practices.

It makes business sense for a firm to take the benefit of the Act and create a law firm based on different experts from different disciplines all working and promoting a common goal for the success of the business. For example, with the recent sanctions put on firms dealing with Russian clients, a director of IT can implement changes to the internal case management system immediately, so that the firm's risk assessments protect the firm. Compare this to a firm that relies on an external IT supplier. The firm would need to arrange an appointment for the IT firm to come into the offices, understand the changes, make the changes, test the changes, and then drive it out to the firm. This is an expense to the firm and the rigid process will delay work being progressed on files. This shows that external dependency on a third party makes a firm inflexible, and a firm based with employees with an invested interest allows firms to be flexible in a volatile market.

Another way in which a firm can stay ahead and be flexible enough to adapt to the changing world is to see what other industries are doing to be flexible. With the rise of computers in the 1980's, the UK legal industry was slow to gain traction in this field, which has had a knock-on effect on how we as solicitors make and see changes.

Looking at our neighbouring industries allows us to have a peek into how they are servicing their clients, because naturally, clients will expect the same standards.

Once upon a time, law firms saw themselves as a law firm rather than a business. There were less competitive business models, less rivalry in fees and more walk-in clients. Law firms that still work off this model may find it hard to sustain their business and adapt to the volatile world. Law firms need to understand they are a business before a law firm, not the other way around.



Priscilla Sinder
Director, Property
Conveyancing Consultancy

There has been much written and debated about how the legal sector can learn from, and potentially replicate, some models from outside the legal eco-system. With legal consumers increasingly pressuring law firms to operate more like other businesses (faster turnarounds, better service, more competitive pricing etc.). Accordingly:

a. what technology and services can help them meet and exceed expectations? and,

b. what areas will deliver the most value for the business?

David: Where to start? Quick wins for law firms include automation, to reduce workloads where lawyers are adding no value from a professional point of view. Automation results in faster turnarounds, better service and if high-fee earners are no longer doing low-value tasks, firms can review their pricing and either be more competitive or keep the larger margins.

Fixed price billing is another area I would explore, although I know it's contentious. The tech exists to analyse and forecast work time and costs, so for many activities it's possible if the firm has the appetite for it.

Self-serve solutions where clients can upload information directly to systems is a quick win. Who wants to do data entry when you can get your clients to do it for you? The benefits include fewer errors, more time to focus on other activities, and so on. It's also something clients want. Instead of having to schedule a call or meeting with you to share information, they can get on with it in their own time.

In terms of what will deliver the most value? Good contract lifecycle management software enables end-to-end legal solutions, it provides a foundation you can build other services on. Get that in place early, and you'll be getting value from it every time you integrate another service.

Martyn: I laugh out loud (LOL I think you say) with the notion that legal consumers are increasingly pressuring law firms to deliver faster turnaround times, better service, more competitive pricing etc. – how dare they?

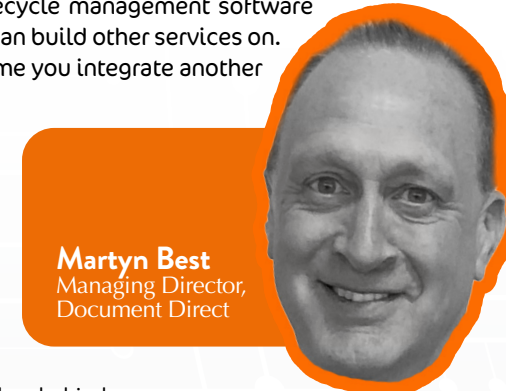
The temerity and bold audacity that customers seek a better service?!

If a law firm finds this a challenge and a novel experience, then I think we should quietly pull down the shutters, close the door, and post the key behind us.

We are all in business to serve our customers as best we can – simps peeps – and armed with that underlying bedrock to our activity, we can then see what can help us in that endeavour.

The rest is just detail - in the detail of the choice of technology, in recruitment of the best people who share that philosophy, and as a leader, making sure that all those elements remain in harmony.

Hmmm, nice point, Martyn. Thinking about the choice of person and/or people, let's explore that a little. Many sectors bring in external experts to head up their companies, who may not necessarily be familiar with their sector, as they look primarily to the skills, attributes, persona, gravitas, and influence of the individual rather than sector knowledge...



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Managing Director,
Document Direct

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Which business leader would you like to be in charge of a law firm? Why?

Martyn: A law firm shouldn't forget one thing – it's a law firm. Consumers expect them to be a law firm, and they expect them to deliver great legal advice. So, in bringing in non-lawyer leadership, there needs to be some caution.

You may have gleaned that I love an unorthodox perspective, but there needs to be a clear understanding of what client and stakeholder perception and expectation is. Embracing external influence is vital, but cultural harmony is also key, and I would see external experts being of vital importance in supporting strong leadership and contributing new and fresh ideas.

It is not a hard activity to deliver great legal advice, and it shouldn't be hard to create and grow a great law firm. Put the basics in place, keep the client and your staff at the heart of everything you do and do enough to be distinctive. Experts can help in all of those areas which are not about legal advice, but, rather controversially for me, I'd pretty much say you need a lawyer at the top.

Do you agree, David? I recall we have mooted this in this past.

David: As much as I like the idea of bringing in external experts, I still believe that law needs to be led by lawyers. What I do believe is that the approach needs to be collaborative with contributions from outside sectors as part of the senior management team.

Sectors I would bring in: Surgeons, there are similar, if not higher, stakes at play in surgery, but there's more recognition that technology can improve things in the medical profession - lawyers can learn a lot from their approach; IT delivery professionals, people who have experience of delivering change through IT solutions; legal transformation specialists, they understand that solutions need to be delivered by a team rather than legal individuals and can put those teams together.

And which non-legal business would you like to see offer legal services? Why? And what can a law firm and/or lawyer learn from such a business? i.e., what does this type of business do far better than a law firm?

David: I don't believe they can. People take advice from people. Why would you trust a non-legal business for legal services? The difference between law firms and professional advisory businesses such as accountancy firms is that the latter have adopted technology faster than legal firms. As soon as law firms do that, they will be able to seize strategic advantage again.

Carpe diem then? Martyn also seized the moment to interject ...

Martyn: Would you buy your eggs from the florist?

No, you'd buy them from the best egg man there was, from someone who knew their eggs inside out, who nurtured the eggs and could help you choose the best there was. Equally, you'd go to a florist with years of experience in growing flowers, in arranging bouquets and in giving you the comfort of their knowledge.

So, whilst I can see some vague merits of Tesco, or the Co-op, or Ernst & Young offering legal services, this is mainly about the point of delivery, and quite clearly, they wouldn't or shouldn't be the prime and obvious place to shop for legal advice.

So, mmm – I wonder why they think they could be?

David Wybourne
Head of Legal AI,
Cloud Business



Expertise

Trust

Well, well – could it be that the historic hill of the law is not the sacred ground it once may have been, and that, shall we call it complacency, has crept in, with lawyers failing to deliver the right eggs and dishing out withering flowers of advice?

In an ideal world, and if the supplier has the correct customer focus you should get your eggs from the egg man, your flowers from the florist and your legal advice from a law firm, and it's up to each of those experts to get their act together or they will fail as a business.

Boom!! I just love how candid you are, Martyn. Speaking of 'boom', the LegalTech market is/has been booming and as a result corporate legal/in-house counsel are being bombarded with marketing campaigns promoting different solutions. However, this group has been slow to adopt **State of the UK Legal Market 2022**.¹ David, why is this, how can LegalTech companies build trust, and how can corporate legal / in-house counsel identify the right areas to invest in?

David: Legal tech companies need to acknowledge that the technology they provide is only part of the solution. Legal transformation is way more than "digital transformation for law". It often requires wholesale change in the way a business operates, change management, adoption of new practices and the pulling together of people to make successful.

IT solution providers have worked with technology vendors for years, hand-in-hand to do this type of work. Legal tech needs to do the same.

The potential for impact is massive. The reality very little. Legal are late to the party, but there are signs of change and lots of forward-thinking individuals looking to shake things up.

I totally agree, David. Okay then, focusing on 'shaking things up', it is no secret that there is a war on talent and salary, therefore:

a. How can law firms ensure they attract new and retain existing talent? And,

b. IYHO is the quantity and/or quality of LegalTech (to assist lawyers in their roles/tasks) and/or LawTech (for clients to self-serve) relevant. How? Why?

Jeroen: In today's hiring market, the competition for both attracting new and retaining existing talent is fierce. Applicants have a sea of choice from big names and good salaries, and constantly expect more from their employers. Today's applicant cares about much more than a big industry name and a good salary. Instead, the modern workforce thinks about elements such as extra benefits, the working environment, the facilities, and the growth opportunities.

In our digitised world, the work facilities and environment employees are looking for not only consist of nice desks, a working coffee machine, and good laptops. Instead, the maturity and quality of a company's LegalTech stack has become a crucial component contributing to the quality of its working environment and employee satisfaction. The applications, solutions, and platforms a company uses contribute enormously to the working experience.



Jeroen Versteijne
Legal Tech Expert,
Betty Blocks

1. https://legalsolutions.thomsonreuters.co.uk/content/dam/ewp-m/documents/legal-uk/en/pdf/reports/state-of-the-uk-legal-market_v2.pdf

Technology

Legal professionals want to be able to focus on what they were hired to do: practise law. No lawyer wants to be irritated about the integration between two company platforms, spend time working through stacks of paperwork, or hunt for internal knowledge. Meanwhile, the modern professional wants to be self-sufficient and enabled to solve their own problems, rather than waiting months for someone else to deliver solutions. Therefore, to retain existing and attract new talent, firms must provide their employees with a LegalTech stack that removes manual labour and automates workflows. Firms must support their organisation with the tools through which they can truly add value, optimise, and innovate. A firm must be innovative, flexible, and forward-thinking to be competitive in the job market.

Providing your firm with a low-code / no-code (LCNC) platform puts the power of innovation in your organisation's hands. Through LCNC development, legal professionals are given the tools to build the solutions to their own and their clients' problems. By custom building applications with LCNC, business users can optimise and automate internal processes to eliminate manual processes and save non-billable hours. On top of this, they can create powerful self-service applications which elevate their client service. A good LegalTech stack contributes to the culture at a firm: LCNC development creates an environment where business users have the power and capabilities to add value and make an impact. An environment that inspires your existing and attracts your new talent.

In turn, this means a revolution in hiring practices. Firms need to start rethinking their traditional hiring processes of employing candidates from the same pool of applicants from similar educational backgrounds with a standard amount of experience. Instead, now is the time to start thinking about integrating a workforce with various types of backgrounds, experience, and expertise to diversify the knowledge at a firm. This makes us think of Muhammad Gangat's - Alumni Ambassador at SMBP - presentation at Crafty Fest London. Working for a charity dedicated to assisting students from low-income backgrounds to pursue a career in the legal and financial industries, Muhammad spoke on the benefits and importance of law firms diversifying their hiring practices. Imagine what a firm could achieve with a workforce consisting of innovation mindsets, varying perspectives and backgrounds.

Ah, yes, that wonderful word 'imagine'... I believe the difference between a company merely surviving to achieving high-end thriving comes down to the ability to imagine at the highest level and then apply the practical outcome of that imaginative process.

It is also no secret that law firms are having to balance the needs of lawyers being in the office with working from home, aka outside/away from the ivory tower; particularly when it comes to trainees, who learn so much from being physically present among their peers.

Can technology bridge the gap caused by WFH when it comes to tomorrow's (junior) lawyers?

Such, you've been quiet today. I'd love to have your input on this since you are a lawyer and also a tech provider to law firms...

Such: My quick answer is no, or at the very least, not yet. This is something that worries me the most when it comes to 'tomorrow's talent'. Having trained lawyers for 20 years, there is no doubt in my mind that in-person training is essential. Young lawyers need to be in the environment to pick up conversations, techniques, ideas...almost by osmosis. When unexpected situations or conversations take place, lawyers have a rich well of knowledge from which to dip into and learn.

I feel it is far harder to engineer those 'off the cuff' moments which are ripe with lessons using technology. That having been said, I can see a world where the likes of the metaverse may be able to bridge the gap. It would mean everyone working in that environment, replacing the office with the digital but it could be possible.



Suchet Amin
(aka Such)

Value

Indeed, anything is possible, all you need is imagination *wink*. David, I have a feeling you have something to add to this debate...

David Technology can help, but even cloud-first companies like ours have found learning and development challenging in some remote teams. Most important is a change of mindset. If a senior partner would invite a junior into a meeting room to observe and learn, they need to do the same for an online meeting. Remembering to brief before the meeting and debrief. Use of technology could be used to record, analyse, and interrogate the conversation had in the meeting; and create reference libraries that could be questioned with cognitive search.

Communication and collaboration tools are also key. You want to replicate the 'water cooler' moment, where someone can ask a quick question without having to pick up the phone or schedule a meeting. While the tech is available to create this kind of environment, the onus must be on senior partners to promote open lines of communication digitally. Trainees are typically young tech savvy individuals so they will have no problem embracing the tech. But they do need to know that they can reach out and get the support they need.

Interesting comments. Let's explore this further and bring this conversation from the macro to micro, shall we? For example, in a legal department within a law firm (e.g., a conveyancing department/firm):

a. are we now seeing a divide in the workplace, aka qualified solicitors/lawyers v tech employees?

Priscilla, real estate, aka property, is your domain. Can you share your thoughts with us please?

Priscilla: We are definitely seeing a divide between qualified solicitors versus technology employees and the Legal Services Act 2007 ("Act") provided the vehicle for this divide. Before the Act was introduced, law firms could only be formed by solicitors. They had the power to do everything related to the firm: marketing, developing the firm and even introducing technology into the firm. After the Act, a person who was skilled in technology could now be a director of the firm or even own a law firm, propelling the firm in a new way which makes legal services easily accessible by the public.

With the introduction of blockchain technology, it will be very evident that the technology-based employees will be in demand to provide the firm with a new vision of how legal services will be offered in the future.

Currently, clients look to their appointed solicitor for trust in the transaction in accordance with the SRA principle 2 - *"You act in a way that upholds public trust and confidence in the solicitors' profession and in legal services provided by authorised persons"*, but if a transaction is placed on the blockchain then where does trust lie? With the solicitor or the data that is distributed amongst those participants on the blockchain?

Thus, does this show a trend where employees in the technology department of a firm are creating a hierarchy where their skills are new and needed more than traditional solicitors to drive business efficiencies? In my humble opinion, we need to look at both disciplines, know who the experts are in each field, and work collaboratively, not in isolation or competition.

Blockchain technology is a decentralised digital ledger distributed amongst a peer-to-peer network. The purpose of a blockchain is to create trust in data, by achieving and maintaining integrity in a distributed ledger (Drescher, D 2017- Blockchain Basics). Once a transaction is placed on the blockchain it is immutable.



Priscilla Sinder
Director, Property
Conveyancing Consultancy

Do you agree, Such?

Such: Quite possibly yes. There may be a fear among lawyers that tech employees are going to make them redundant as they build solutions that replace the work they do. I don't see that, and it is simply a matter of education. Tech employees typically want to help solve problems. That is directly aligned with lawyers. The difference is that they want to predominantly use tech to do it.

The lawyers need to re-educate their thinking and perspective and embrace these new systems and treat them as the tools of tomorrow. These new tech tools will actually help lawyers to do their job, removing administrative burden and mundane tasks, allowing the lawyers to do what they do best – be a lawyer, speak to their client and represent their client.

And,

b. where now does the power lie? The tech employees that create these whizzy portals therefore making sure they are addressing the speed that the clients want, or the solicitors who provide the legal service to the client?

Such: Good question. I'd say probably still with the lawyer but only because typically the legal sector is slow to adopt to tech in comparison to other industries. However, that power imbalance will shift but I'd hope the scales wouldn't tip to favour the tech employees. Collaboration between the two is far more beneficial and powerful than a power struggle.

Priscilla: So long as both solicitor and technology employees work in unison then there should not be any divide. I have seen in my career, situations where there seems to be an unfair balance where solicitors are working to the tune of some third-party influence. This is not correct in my humble opinion, because the aim as a solicitor is always to act in the best interest of your client, not a third party.

Thus, a solicitor needs to empower the tech employee to create whizzy portals, but the solicitors should always remain in control of the transaction. The client has paid for a service that needs to be delivered by a solicitor not the technology company.

And,

c. IYHO, what is worth more today for business owners: the speed to get the client in and out of a transaction (specific to conveyancing) or making sure there are no PI claims years down the line? Therefore, do we favour speedy conveyancing or traditional conveyancing?

Priscilla: Traditional conveyancing wins! There is no comparison. What is the point of speedy conveyancing when you have professional indemnity insurance claims down the line? Traditional conveyancing is an art and when done correctly, it is a job that is extremely rewarding.

Such: I have spoken to a number of insurers and brokers who believe that the use of technology, which typically will speed up a transaction, actually lowers risk. Insurers are taking a close look at how technology is going to impact risk in the medium and long term, but initial assessments point towards a low risk firm. There's no doubt that a business that can transact faster is far more valuable. By transacting faster, cash is released quicker to re-invest into the growth of the business. The longer cash is locked in a transaction, the more that business is starved of cash. That's the business case, but the social case is far stronger. Any client using any service of any kind expects and wants speed. If you can deliver on a promise to be as fast as possible, then that client will rave about you and your business. The potential is repeat business, referrals, online reviews, happy staff, and so on. That will certainly translate into value.



Suchet Amin
(aka Such)

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Speaking of 'risk', the war in Ukraine has increased risk assessments for law firms, as Russian clients are seen as high-risk:

How has the legal community addressed this? How do you tell a long-standing Russian client that you can no longer complete their transaction as they are on a high-risk list that goes against the firm's policy?

Priscilla: This is a hard question to put into practice, but in theory it is simple to answer. Your main duty as a solicitor is to act in the best interest of your client and not to breach the Solicitors Code of Conduct ("Code"). How can you continue to do both and still act in line with your dual obligations when the SRA recently announced no one can act for a client subject to sanctions?

This will be a hard conversation to have with your long-standing Russian client, but quite simply put you will have to withdraw instructions. No solicitor should ever compromise their duty if it means breaching regulations. If you are struck off because of an unwise choice, then you will not be able to act for any long-standing clients in any event.

Always maintain your professionalism and work in the spirit of the Code.

Well said, Priscilla. Forgive me but due to this unbearable heat methinks we should wrap the meeting up shortly, agree? *Unanimous nods* *wipingofbrowswithhandkerchiefs* *gulps of water*

I've just got a couple more questions...

It is an increasing trend that consumers/clients are happy to engage with technology rather than a human in many sectors. As consumers/clients become more comfortable with services being delivered with little to no human contact outside the legal world, it is arguable that at some point consumers/clients will not want to speak to their lawyer at all:

How do you see legal services adapting to this growing trend?

Such: This transition has already begun...many years ago with the arrival of e-mail. Almost instantaneously clients now had access to a faster and easier form of communication, totally replacing the need to speak to their lawyer. As other industries started to globally influence client/consumer engagement, the need to speak to anyone is fast disappearing.

Have you ever had an issue with an Amazon purchase? Their online wizard is superb at handling issues. Every issue you might have can be handled online with no human involvement on their part. If you really needed to speak to someone, it is a last resort so while they recognise there is still a need for human contact, it is only in the most extreme of cases. It wouldn't surprise me if Amazon managed 99% of customer queries without any human contact. As I see it, global companies are dictating client experience through technology and technology alone. That is fast embedding a sense of convenience and comfort for consumers who then transfer their expectations onto other services with which they engage. Legal is no exception. I can speak from experience with my law firm. We have a 'cohort' of clients that will only communicate with us through our technology platforms, predominantly our app. If we initiate a call, they will happily speak to us but only because we made the call to them...not the other way around.

I can see legal services having to provide a number of communication tools beyond e-mail quickly, if they aren't already. I suspect that law firms may resist for a while, not least because of security and compliance issues, or perhaps a perception of cost being unmanageable. I see this as a real threat if at least the idea is not entertained by firms. From my experience, clients are already placing their business, when it comes to legal services, where they can communicate through technology (other than e-mail). Interestingly, I've seen firms actually charge for this and their clients are happy to pay for it.

Sucheet Amin
(aka Such)



Leader

Competition

Jeroen: In a digitised and tech-mediated world, consumers are increasingly used to engaging with technology instead of humans. In almost all sectors, consumers are being provided with digitised services: ordering in a bar through a QR code, checking their banking with an app, contacting customer service through a chatbot. Here's the thing: today's consumer doesn't want to interact with a person if a digital service or solution is going to be faster, easier, and more efficient.

However, there are two reasons why there will never come a point when consumers won't want to have human-mediated services at all. This is particularly true for the legal industry, for two main reasons.

- 1) There is a counter-culture where, in such a digital world, consumers have started craving more human interactions.
- 2) Within the legal industry, there are tasks and services which will always require human expertise, judgment, and intuition which cannot be digitised.

This means that the legal industry is facing clients who are expecting fast, efficient, top-notch, digitally enabled legal services. To meet these client needs, the legal industry must learn to combine technology with their human expertise. For the more complex and specialised legal services, lawyers will always be necessary and valued. However, there is a huge opportunity in automating or digitising various repeatable processes and workflows: letting technology take over these.

By building client-facing applications which fit your customers' exact needs, clients can independently use digitally mediated legal services until they require direct expertise or guidance from a legal professional. Meanwhile, by allowing technology to take over services which are low-complexity, repeatable, and automate time-heavy manual processes, you save your legal professionals a lot of time.

Here's a good example: There are various requests, questions, services, and advice which are recurring needs for many clients. Building a Customer Knowledge Base which centralises and digitises key advice and guidance allows your clients to find information independently and 24/7. This saves time within your firm and for your client, eliminating the process of establishing direct contact and manually answering questions. Meanwhile, legal professionals are enabled to focus on more complex or niche requests or issues. This digitises a firm's services, while keeping open the option for human support.

David: Depends entirely on the problem at hand but we are seeing the same trend whether booking tickets for a festival, dealing with finance, or getting counselling. It is only a matter of time.

As I mentioned before, legal services need to have more accessible solutions where people can self-serve to either provide information or to get information, and to ask for help if they can't find answers to their question. That means technology to enable questioning, fact finding and algorithms to determine outcomes; brand building to develop trust and confidence with legal consumers; and, a pricing model that enables the customer to know how much it's going to cost and what they can get for a fixed price.

Priscilla: Legal services are already adapting to the growing trend of technology. Here are some powerful facts noted in a report published by the Law Society:²

1. Eighty five percent of job concepts in 2030 do not yet exist;
2. Fifty percent of people are unable to predict the roles and skills in their sector in the next 10-15 years;
3. AI will have a vote on the Board.



Jeroen Versteijne
Legal Tech Expert,
Betty Blocks

Imagination

Despite the above facts, we also know that there is still a generation of clients who want and need the human touch. Humans and technology work well in collaboration, not in isolation. As of today, technology cannot fully replace humans due to its lack of human emotions. In my humble opinion, so long as humans are buying and selling properties, we will always want a property solicitor being part of the transaction.

Technology supports humans, it does not replace humans. Can AI be programmed with human emotional logic? This is an important question, but society is not ready for legal services to be driven solely by AI. Humans need humans.

Martyn: People will always want to ultimately engage with people.

Just think about the automated helpdesk calls we make – “press button 5, push button 4, we're sorry we are busy, please call back!”

That was once thought to be a useful application of technology, now known as a “client rejection policy”.

Use of automation in law firms can hugely help the process, and eliminate time wasting and repetition of humdrum tasks, and the best applications will be totally unseen by clients and they just see the final outcome.

As we all know, it's that human interaction that distinguishes us all, and brings the relationship alive. It's also the point when we learn more about our client and what their longer-term aims are, and of course, what our longer-term revenue streams may be from supporting them.

Lawyers of all types (criminal, civil, general counsel) are under increasing pressure nowadays due to many external factors and influences (as noted in earlier questions). Engaging with technology can be both liberating and stressful, as many lawyers will testify.

Such, if a lawyer/GC/barrister/law student is feeling stressed out:

a. How would you recommend they de-stress?³

Block out 'you-time'. Get into the habit of having something that is all about you. Reading (not law journals); exercise; hobby... something that gives some private space to disconnect. It's important to take holidays and get away.

b. How do you de-stress?

Holidays for me is top of my list. Spending time with either friends or my family helps me manage stress... and it has to be getting away. By being away from everything I am forced to disconnect and not worry about what's going on back at work. Although thinking about it, every day I set myself up to 'deal with stress'. I get up early and go to the gym every day. It helps me drive energy and fire into my body and mind, ready to tackle what's coming in the next 10 hours ahead.

c. Is stress caused not by other people or external events, but by your reactions to them?

I'd say that's true. Stress is a reaction to a person or an event not the person or the event itself. It doesn't make what that person said or what that event did right, but the consequence is what leads to stress. I'm not sure if that means we should be taking responsibility for our stress based on how we react – that would essentially give everyone and everything a free pass and put enormous pressure on us as individuals. But I certainly try to box things that cause me stress as a way to help manage and tackle the issue.

Unbearable heat stresses me out. Enough! Let's call it a day, gang!!



Martyn Best
Managing Director,
Document Direct

2. 'Images of the Future Worlds Facing the Legal Profession 2020-2030' (Chittenden, T. 2021)

3. https://www.linkedin.com/posts/haivard-business-review_pressure-doesnt-have-to-turn-into-stress-activity-6949691284005548032-57?utm_source=linkedin_share&utm_medium=ios_app

chriessie's frank finale

We survived. Just...

We managed to adapt and get through the (understandably shorter than usual) session without **The Naked Lawyer** causing her customary mischief and 'positive' external influence, thank goodness.

But, despite our best efforts, I'm not convinced we thrived. We were more like withering triflids than glorious sunflowers in this oppressive heatwave and sunshine...

Nonetheless, it was yet another lovely get-together of the tech ambassador board mootting an important topic of the day and all our futures – what it takes, and how, to adapt, survive and thrive in a chaotic (legal) world, aka being prepared for 'outside influence' likely to affect, disrupt and alter the status quo whether overnight or via a 'longtail' effect. 'Twas ever thus btw. And always shall be.

Reflecting on what the tech ambassadors have shared during this roundtable, I can't help thinking that in our new world (dis)order, the adage that we must "change what we can and manage what we can't" ought to be flipped to "manage what we can and change what we can't".

These past two to three hell-raising years, in particular, have been a shocking wake-up call to us all. In business, life, family, and love, we must prepare exceptionally well for the worst, but yet have a little faith and a lot of hope for the best.

With the world in such a fragile state in many respects, and the legal eco-system in the UK and globally potentially at such a vulnerable point, with stress levels in the workplace and mental health problems increasing amongst the talent pool worldwide we might, in LawLawLand, do well to be satisfied with simply surviving and park the drive to thrive...for the time being at least.

Perhaps we should listen to the wisdom of the Buddha:

"Health is the greatest gift, contentment the greatest wealth, faithfulness the best relationship."

If "wealth is the ability to fully experience life" (Henry David Thoreau) and contentment is wealth, then we should be content with survival to truly experience our life, n'est-ce pas?

I'm confident if *The Naked Lawyer* was here she would opine: "In an unkind, unpredictable, ungodly world, sod thriving! Surviving is enough in LawLawLand, today. Tomorrow, however, is another day..."

So-long, farewell, auf wiedersehen, goodnight...

By Chrissie Lightfoot Chief Tech Advisor and Writer to Modern Law (Chair of the 'Technology in Law Land' roundtable).

Chrissie is an Independent Non-Executive Director and Advisor, a global multi-award winning Legal Futurist, Consultant, Influencer, Entrepreneur, Lawyer, AI LawTech Pioneer, Strategist, Marketeer, Brand builder, best-selling Author and Keynote Speaker. Founder and CEO of EntrepreneurLawyer Ltd.



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