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Resistance is futile. Social media has become an essential part of the marketing mix.

You may have heard that. You may have pleaded with your firm to pay attention, and you may have been left frustrated, realizing that your lawyers just don't want to blog or use social media. Most likely, you have a range at your firm, with some attorneys completely rejecting social media and others more open to the idea.

In working with large firms during the past 18 months, I've recognized six common steps that law firms must negotiate to bring about full social media assimilation. I've written dozens of articles about why using social media is important. This one focuses on the hurdles you must get past to bring your lawyers up to speed.

Step 1: Rejection

"Looks like a waste of time."

"Nobody but kids and slackers use social media."

"I hate computers."

Within every firm, some individuals are so behind the times and so technologically challenged that they are stuck at Step 1 and they like it there. There is safety and bliss in the un-technical world they understand. The first goal is to move these people to Step 2.

Step 2: Resistance

"I see how it works, but it's not for me."

"Can't you just have the associates do this?"

"I can't even read all my incoming e-mail — don't ask me to do one this too."

Resistance represents a step forward, because now the lawyers are using an excuse. It means they hear you, but still reject the idea. This is progress. If you keep at it, you might get the lawyers to take the next step.

Step 3: Partial acceptance

"I can see how social media might work for a certain type of lawyer."

"Blogs make sense, but too many risks for my taste."

"A blog could help me get my name out there, but I'm not sure I could dedicate the time needed to really make it pay off."

Partial acceptance is a great thing. If law firms can get their management committees to Step 3, it will pave the way for innovation within the firm. Partial acceptance means that lawyers are willing to talk about social media, even if they haven't quite wrapped their heads around it or understand how it fits into the strategic goals of the firm.

Step 4: Full acceptance

"I'm ready to start a blog."

"I know it's a big time commitment, but I'm willing to make the sacrifice."

"I'm on LinkedIn and Twitter — now what do I do?"

Full acceptance seems very exciting — and it is — but it's only the beginning. Just because a lawyer wants to use social media doesn't mean that he has what it takes to make it work. Full acceptance doesn't require any actual change in behavior, but it does signify that a tipping point has been reached in terms of attitude. When a lawyer reaches this point, your firm needs to be ready to take full advantage to convert this attitude into action.

Step: 5 Partial assimilation

"I've just made the most amazing connection using Twitter."

"I just had my first appointment thanks to a conversation through a LinkedIn group."

"My last blog post really got some comments going."

Partial assimilation is truly exciting. This is a real Aha! Moment — at least it was for me. To recognize the power of these tools to help me actually make new connections and start conversation was powerful. Only those who are at least partially assimilated will find success through the use of social media. More importantly, they can serve as champions to inspire the rest of your organization.

Step 6: Full assimilation

"I'm meeting some amazing people through my blog and Twitter — you should really try this."

"This blog has been a great experience. What can I do to help other members of the firm get started?"

"If we have any other lawyers who want to get started, have them give me a call. I'd be glad to show them the ropes."

Lasting change and innovation at the organizational level must come from within. That's why champions within an organization are key to bringing this about. As I have worked with large organizations, I have observed that these internal champions are key. Without them, law firms will have trouble overcoming the inertia and internal resistance to change.

Who makes the best champions?

We often think that the younger generation will be the best at championing social media, but this isn't often the case. More experienced lawyers who

are well respected and understand how to develop new contacts often will be the best fit.

The other misconception is that we should get the most tech-savvy lawyer to be the champion. This, too, is problematic. The lawyer who is tech-savvy may not have the best ability to relate to other attorneys. Let's be honest — the first person in the office to buy the latest iPhone may not be the most popular or the most influential. Find champions who are well liked and have the potential to lead the charge.

What should the process be?

A simple kick-off event isn't enough. The best process is a steady drum beat. Cognitive psychologists use the term "spaced repetition" — you need to repeat the instructions. Create a mastermind group of a dozen or so interested individuals and have them meet on a monthly basis. Teach them, give them assignments and make sure they know they will be expected to report during the next month's meeting. Accountability is a huge component of driving change within the firm. These individuals will be accountable to each other, accountable to themselves and accountable to firm management.

For now, you don't need to worry too much about the Luddites within your firm (those stuck at Step 1) — they will come around when the time is right. They didn't want cell phones either, but look at them now. Focus on moving the people at Step 3 to Step 4 and turning those at Step 5 into champions. Start with these incremental changes and, eventually, you can bring about full assimilation. It may not be firm-wide, but it's a start. If that doesn't work, simply tell them, "Resistance is futile."

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