



Why I Write about “The Law Practice Revolution”

Written on April 5, 2010 by Donna Seyle

I have to admit that, although I’ve written about changes in law practice management continuously in this blog, I’ve never been bold enough to ascribe to the “R” word: revolution. But after reading Jordan Furlong’s blog post “The Blind Side”, I feel free enough to express that the notion that these “changes” are not just interesting concepts to read about and set aside. For new solo/small firms, incorporation of these practices is mandatory for success. And for firms that continue to adhere to the staid traditions of the law practice model, don’t be taken by surprise when your client base starts to dwindle. The revolution is here, it’s now, and according to the thought leaders who spoke at the Georgetown Law’s conference, “Law Firm Evolution: Brave New World or Business as Usual.” it is even beyond our expectations. So listen up!

The need for change has been driven by the recession and technology. The goal of any firm that wants to survive and succeed is to lower it’s overhead so it can reduce its and its client’s costs and compete with the suddenly flooded marketplace of lawyers. In my post “Law Firms of 2010: The 5 Pillars of Change.” I listed 5 concepts you need to look at:

1. A complete review of your law practice management;
2. Incorporation of blogging and social media as a cost-free marketing plan;
3. Incorporation of alternative fee models;
4. Operating on a virtual law practice platform; and
5. Use of time-saving and cost-effective legal tech tools.

The seriousness of the movement, however, is being taken even further overseas. In “The Blind Side”, Furlong states:

“One of Richard’s [Susskind] topics was the *Legal Services Act* in England & Wales, and its soon-to-be-active provisions allowing alternative business structures (ABSs), including non-lawyer equity investment in law firms and legal enterprises. . .he reported that law firms are not their primary target; in fact, their interest is coalescing around legal service providers that we now consider to be on the fringes of the profession, like legal processing outsourcing companies. These are the providers that outside investors think are much likelier than law firms to emerge successful from the ABS upheaval, and it’s where most of the new capital is going to go.”

The conference also stressed that the nature of LPO projects would grow from “grunt work” to projects of more significance, thereby requiring greater skill levels. The outsourcing of these projects is another cost-effective practice that can increase a firm’s bottom line.

In Mylegal.com’s featured interview by Gregory P. Bithifis of Richard Susskind, author of The End of Lawyers? and early predictor of technology’s impact on the traditional law firm structure, Susskind expressed surprise that the conference had not discussed the role of technology in the evolution of law practice. He continues to believe that, just as businesses in general have revolutionized their business practices, so law firms will continue to be required to do so if they want to remain viable.

Obviously, the primary purposes to these changes is to compete efficiently, effectively and successfully in the marketplace. But there is another benefit to you as a result of this new direction. All of these practices encourage an openness and engagement with your clients that creates a more satisfying experience than we, as lawyers, often encounter. Blogging and engaging in social media encourage self-expression, so if a client comes to you via those means, he/she will have a good sense who you are. Working with clients to come to a fee agreement creates cooperative relationship and eases the anxiety of the billing outcome for both the client and the practitioner. Using technology properly will enable you to think better, work smarter, and get more done with less effort.

Tomorrow’s law firms are already here, and no longer measure your skill level by how many miserable hours you manage to eke out of your week. It’s a great time to be a lawyer, and an imperative time to join the revolution. If you would like more information or training, I’m happy to direct you!