

## Why Law Schools Are Failing Attorneys and The Legal Industry

By: Stephen Fairley

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Law schools are failing the 43,600 attorneys who graduate from them year after year...

A bold statement? Not really from my perspective.

I was watching the video interview of [Rex Gradeless on his Social Media Law Student blog](#) the other day.

If you don't know Rex I first found him on [Twitter](#).

Rex has, according to [Lextweet.com](#), the largest number of followers on twitter of anyone in the legal industry. At last count he was well over 63,000 followers (@Rex7). I was very impressed with this and so I started following him some months back just to see how a law student was using social media to build a loyal following. In the video interview he mentions just graduating law school and taking the bar exam (I hope you pass Rex).

I was inspired to write this post partially by his situation and also a discussion on [LinkedIn under the Legal Marketing group](#). I'm sure more than a few law schools will not like this post, but then again, as those of you who know me understand that being liked by everyone has never been a very strong motivator for me.

**I truly believe law schools are failing most of the attorneys who depend on them to show them how to be a successful attorney.**

I have heard that around 85% of lawyers end up in a small law firm at some point in their career. The number of new solo practices that open up every year far outweighs the number of attorneys who are now entering big law.

If you do not even know the fundamentals of setting up a law practice (from a business perspective), how to build relationships with referral sources, the principles of excellent customer service, and specific strategies for law firm marketing and business development how can you reasonably expect to succeed in this dog eat dog environment?

Bottom line: You cannot...unless you depend on someone else to feed you, thereby making you a helpless and hapless dependent.

For those of you running or working at law schools who follow me (yes, I know who you are) here is my challenge to you:

**Is this really the best you can do? You are the institution whereby almost every single person who wants to practice law must go through—you are the first line of defense for the legal industry...and you are failing them.**

You must hold yourself to a higher standard than to continue cranking out lawyers who are entirely unprepared for the intensity and effort required to build a financially successful and personally satisfying law practice. **You are better than this!**

Your constituents depend on you to teach them how to be successful lawyers, in every sense of the word. If you know the majority of them will require an understanding of various areas of the law, you teach them.

So will someone PLEASE tell me why you will not teach them the business side of law if virtually all of them will be required to know it and practice it when they get out?

Most, if not all, law schools do not teach (and many do not even offer) a single course on the "business of law." What? Are you serious?

Can anyone please give me a logical reason why you should not require at least 2-3 entire classes on this? Perhaps even require it in your internship experience?

Many attorneys are still taught the best way to grow a law firm is to go work for "big law" for 7-10 years and see how the big boys do it (bottom line is they don't know how either). There are several myths and unspoken implications in this fallacious thinking:

- **Just being a good attorney is enough:** Hogwash! That may have worked 20 years ago, but certainly not in today's hypercompetitive environment. 20 years ago (probably the last time when many law school professors were last practicing) it was enough to be a good attorney and just by hanging out your shingle, clients would start coming in. But does anyone still remember those days?
- **Competency will rule the day.** How does anyone still believe this stuff? Look around...we all know attorneys who are borderline incompetent who have more clients than they can handle and vice versa we know many attorneys who excel at their craft and are dead broke!

**Let's put this myth to rest once and for all: Having a financially successful practice has absolutely NOTHING to do with being a great lawyer or having perfected your legal skills!!**

You can hire great technicians who can do the legal work for you. They are a dime a dozen right now. Who is truly in demand? Rainmakers! Lawyers who can bring in the business and the deal makers will always take their rightful place at the head of the table.

Do not misunderstand: I am not giving anyone an excuse to be incompetent in your craft. There is no excuse for that. Like thousands of others, I too have been taken advantage of by incompetent attorneys, but unlike others I know the truth—the majority of attorneys (at least in small law firms) are fair minded, competent, caring professionals who love to serve their clients to the best of their ability.

## **Competency is necessary, but not sufficient to a successful law practice!**

- **You can learn good rainmaking skills by osmosis:** The implication is that you will naturally pick it up if you are smart enough. As someone who has taught over 6,000 attorneys how to be rainmakers I can tell you with some authority that having intelligence does not in any shape or fashion equate to being an effective Rainmaker.

Intelligence may help you pick up the skills faster, but it does not ensure you will know how to apply them. Rainmaking is a skill you must learn and develop. It is not something that 95% of people are born with.

In other fields, the companies that hire graduates have demanded their training change to meet their needs. It does not serve the best interests of attorneys nor does it serve law firms to have to hire young attorneys who are incompetent when it comes to business development.

And how about the role the media plays in this? Every year [U.S. News & World Report's law school rankings](#) come out and every law school fights to be in the top positions! There's big money riding on this not to mention prestige.

**U.S. News & World Report (and other ranking systems), here's my recommendation: add a new category in "Training in Business Development" or "Law Firm Marketing Training" that plays a part in weighing your rankings.**

When every law school (except one or two) FAILS the test, those who pay attention to this critical area will rise to the top.

We have ranking categories for everything else from Alternative Dispute Resolution to Zoning law. So why not "law firm marketing training"? And no, "clinical training" does not cut it.

[Entrepreneur magazine rates business schools](#) in terms of how well they prepare students for entrepreneurship. We all know that small businesses are the back bone of America. So Entrepreneur magazine has taken up the mantle to reward universities and B-schools who teach core skills of entrepreneurship. BTW, if you were interested Babson College is #1 and University of Arizona (my adopted home state) is #4.

**Why shouldn't a legal magazine rate law schools in how well they prepare attorneys for the business of law?**

Is this pie in the sky thinking? Perhaps, but someone needs to exert some outside pressure on these behemoths in order to effect real change.

**Attorneys in practice, here is my challenge to you: When will you stand up and say you have had enough?** When will you demand a better trained workforce of young associates? Have you had a heart to heart conversation with your local law school? Have you tried to push for change from the inside out?

Until lawyers in both "big law" and small law firms lobby these law schools I do not believe you see a change in this irresponsible behavior.

If you do not take up the banner and demand something better from law schools who will?

I await your comments, rants and insights...

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Stephen Fairley is a nationally recognized law firm marketing expert and has helped more than 6,000 attorneys from hundreds of law firms across the country to discover the secrets of generating more referrals and filling their practice.

He is the international best-selling author of 10 books and 5 audio programs.

He has appeared in the American Bar Association Journal, Entrepreneur, Inc., Fortune Small Business, Harvard Management Update, Business Advisor, the Chicago Tribune, Crain's Chicago Business, and on the front covers of AdvantEdge and Choice magazines.

Stephen is a member of the prestigious National Speaker's Association and his Rainmaker seminars have been sponsored by more than 20 of the largest state and local bar associations in the country.

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