

The Law Firm of the Future: Part III

By Gary Mitchell; Managing Director, GEM Communications Inc.

September 2008

Where are you now?

In my last two columns, I presented a vision of what the law firm of the future could look like and provided you with ideas for how to take the lead in getting your law firm there. In this last and final segment of “The Law Firm of the Future” trilogy, I offer some thoughts on how you can determine where you are now in relation to the future and how to prioritize where you start. And as a wrap-up, I review a couple of the most critical elements for leading the kind of change you’ll need to become the law firm of the future.

First, think about where you are now.

In terms of leadership, does your managing partner see the future? Is he or she effective at leading? Have you talked to them about the changes you wish to implement? Are they onside? If the answer to most of these is yes, then work with them to determine next steps. If the answer is no, you have a couple of choices: seek out a firm that has progressive leadership or lead a quiet revolution from within by creating small pilot programs (as referred to in Part II published in the June 2008 issue of *Lexpert*®) to plant the seeds of change at various levels within your firm.

What about talent development? Does your firm provide individual support and development for associates, partners and practice group leaders? If yes, how can you coordinate those efforts to synergize the outcomes that create the change you’re seeking? If the answer is no, which lawyers could you approach to initiate small programs (baby steps) to get the ball rolling? Where are the leaders (early adopters) within your firm? Find them.

Infrastructure is also an important element in the transition. Does your firm have the systems and processes in place to support change and growth? For example, do you have software

that enables you to measure results, keep track of billings, monitor budgets, and manage clients? At a minimum, do your plans include objectives and measurement goals? If you don’t, spend your time developing them first. These must be in place before any serious (even very small) change effort can be taken on. If you do have these in place, what are you waiting for?

Also remember that you cannot do with on your own. Do you have the team in place that is capable of supporting change? Is everyone’s role clearly defined? Is this team accountable to you or to someone else? You must have a team (informal or formal) of early adopters around you. If you don’t, start here and then move on to infrastructure.

Lastly, complete a self assessment. Take an honest look at your firm. Where do you think you and your firm are now? I’ll bet you’re in one of three places:

1. **Almost there:** You’re at a firm where your top level management (managing partner, managing committee and all C-level professionals) “get it.” Congratulations! *Strategy:* Stop reading this article right now and get the team together and set out a plan of action to become the law firm of the future.

2. **Uphill battle:** You’re at a firm where your top level management doesn’t “get it”. *Strategy:* Save yourself the pain and aggravation, move to a firm where they do get it and help create the law firm of the future there.

3. **Somewhere in the middle:** You’re at a firm where you believe some “get it”, but some don’t. Yet, you still maintain hope that you can become the law firm of the future. What’s next for you?

Strategy: Lead a revolution from within.



Gary Mitchell

GEM Communications Inc.

Suite 675

142-757 West Hastings St.

Vancouver, BC

V6C 1A1

(604) 669-5235

www.gemcommunications.ca

©2008 GEM Communications Inc.

The Law Firm of the Future—Part III

When will your firm be the law firm of the future? It's up to you, but remember:

Make it count. Start this process where the most pressing need is for your firm. If you already have potential leaders who understand the client-centric business model, focus on grooming them (find out what they want/need and help them). If your biggest need is to drive/inspire business development activity — start there. If you're fortunate enough to work in a firm who already has a client-centric business view, then invest in your junior talent from the start and create the next generation (“the new way generation”) from the ground up.

Take baby steps. Take one small step at a time, establish baseline results and gain momentum.

Leverage the energy from one pilot to initiate another. Create a cycle of pilots — each one building on the success of the previous one and then communicate your successes over and over and over.

Engage and communicate. When you have a few successful pilots behind you, take your plan to the next level by sharing your vision firm-wide. Ensure everyone knows the value proposition. Ensure your lawyers and staff can see themselves in this vision and that they want to be part of it. Ensure they understand how this will positively impact their own careers. Get their feedback from the start. When they've been part of building it, they'll be more likely to engage in it.

This article first appeared in the September 2008 issue of *Lexpert*®.

Gary Mitchell is a business development coach and the Managing Director of GEM Communications; a talent development agency specializing in the legal industry. He leads an international team of coaches, consultants and trainers who assist lawyers and law firms prepare for the future, one leader at a time. He can be reached at 604-669-5235 or gary@gemcommunications.ca.



MAKE RAIN. We show you how.™