

## Business & Careers

# When disruption means opportunity



**Gary Mitchell**  
The Coach

It seems no matter where you look, “disruption” has become a buzz word in the legal industry. Although most of the media coverage paints a very dismal picture, it doesn’t have to mean doom and gloom. It can spell opportunity if you keep your eye on the ball and focus on what your clients need.

Change is all around us. Disruption is everywhere. But if you are still of the mindset that change is temporary and if you are patient, everything will go back to normal, stop kidding yourself. Change and disruption in the legal industry, the subject of a day-long conference at Harvard Law School in March, is the new norm. Look it up, it’s worth watching the video.

Recently, in the U.K.-based “legal futures”

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group I belong to on LinkedIn, a discussion focused on the potential impact of having legal kiosks in Wal-Mart stores in Ontario. Lawyers in the U.K. are talking about innovation and disruption in the Canadian legal market? If Wal-Mart is getting into the legal business, they see a real opportunity. How long will it be before we



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see them popping up in all of their stores across Canada? And if Wal-Mart is getting in to the business of legal services, how long before Target does too? And so on.

I found it fascinating that one of the lawyers was spending so much time complaining about the “new reality.” If you can hear someone whining in their writing, that’s what it sounded like. I wanted to suggest to him that instead of complaining about it, perhaps he should focus that attention on figuring out how to be a part of creating the future.

I also wanted to point out to him that lawyers’ challenges have finally caught up to those that your clients have been dealing with for years. Greater access to information, greater competition (and not just from other lawyers, but other service providers), technology, social media, clients from small to large wanting better value — the list goes on and on.

I know it’s tough. Lawyers are being squeezed from top to bottom. And the challenges are not always the same. This column is not meant to focus on the “doom and gloom,” but on the opportunities to get out there and re-invent “you” to be a part of the change, and perhaps even lead it.

A great example comes from a family law lawyer in the Toronto area. Recognizing the greater access to information and the number of people self-representing themselves in family court is growing at a staggering rate due to rising legal costs, he created a self-serve website (FamilyLawHelp.ca) to help educate people who were going to do it on their own. They can pick and choose from an a la carte menu the services they want without having to retain his firm for the entire process. He even offers coaching for the clients to show them how to do it. If they decide to look for a firm for parts of it, he is well positioned to get that work. Instead of losing out because of this challenge, he found a way to address it and bring in revenue for his firm at the same time. This is an excellent example of understanding the challenges in the market you serve, and creating solutions that you can capitalize on.

That’s an example of innovation at the small firm level. For those of you at large firms, how does it relate to you? It’s all

about unbundling services, making it easier for your clients to purchase your services, streamlining process and cutting the fat, providing more value, etc.

Here is another example of innovation, this one from a big law firm, LeClairRyan, in the U.S. They partnered with an outside provider to collaborate in the design and implementation of one of the most comprehensive legal-support delivery programs in the industry. They recognized their clients’ desire for cost effective, end-to-end solutions and came up with a way to deliver this better than any other firm. I encourage you to look up the story for more details.

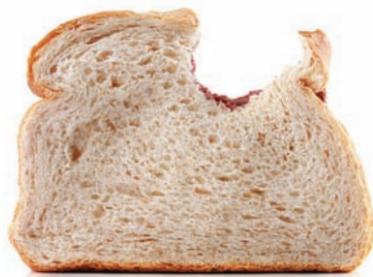
Again, how does this apply to your practice or firm? How can you make it easier for your clients? How can you make it easier for new clients to retain you? A good place to start would be to have a dialogue with your clients to fully understand all of their challenges, priorities, goals, and their big-picture vision. Then look at your competition. What are they doing? What are they not doing? Where are the opportunities for you to stand out? How can you better deliver your legal services with more efficiency and value?

If you think all this talk about disruption and providing more value to your clients is reserved to the U.S. market, think again. Recently, a general counsel of one of Canada’s largest companies wrote an open letter to the ABA encouraging firms to “act like a business already.” What did he mean by that? Get lean and nimble, cut the fat; provide the best service possible in the most cost-effective manner. Start operating like your clients do.

Disruption can mean opportunity if you are one of those lawyers or law firms looking to not only be a part of the change, be a part of leading the change.

*Gary Mitchell works with lawyers, law clerks and law firms across Canada helping them to attract more clients and grow their businesses. He is the co-founding partner of Legal A Team, an agency focused on providing big firm marketing support to smaller law firms and solo practice lawyers, and author of ‘Raindance: The Business Development Guidebook for Lawyers.’ He can be reached at gary@ontraccoach.com or 604-669-5235.*

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