

## Business & Careers

# Embrace innovation or risk becoming a dinosaur



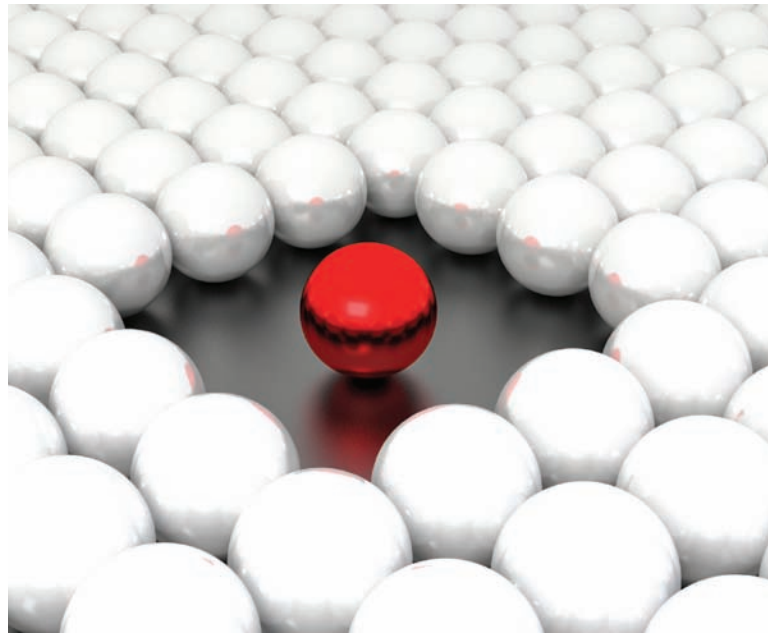
**Gary Mitchell**  
**The Coach**

Are there too many lawyers? Two recent reports out of Quebec and Ontario would suggest there are. What does this mean for the next generation of lawyers? First off you better get really good at marketing. With all of this competition you need to find ways to set yourself apart. You'd better become entrepreneurial and gain more business skills. Because of the lack of jobs, you might also consider starting your own shop—a growing trend I've noticed over the past couple of years.

The first study out of Quebec from the Young Bar Association of Montreal shows 18.2 per cent of lawyers called to the bar can't find permanent jobs. That's compared to 11.2 per cent only a decade ago. And there is a crisis in articling positions as well. But even the students who get articling positions and get called to the bar are finding it very difficult to land a permanent job.

There are simply too many lawyers, 326 per 100,000 residents in the province of Quebec. The report proposes that E'cole du Barreau, which administers bar exams in the province, enforce stricter quotas aimed at reducing the per-capita lawyer population by 19 per cent, to 275 lawyers per 100,000 residents.

In Ontario, a ratio of 339 lawyers per 100,000 residents has led to an articling crisis that has forced the Law Society of Upper



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Canada to allow academic substitutes such as the LPP program at Ryerson University. There has been much controversy over this program with some suggesting it is creating a two-tier system.

Back to the Quebec report which also recommends business administration training for lawyers (something I highly agree with), and more realistic information about job prospects for students in high school and CEGEP.

The report demands that the various professional bodies, law schools, bar associations, the Ministry of Justice and the law society develop strategies to solve the problem together, instead of working separately, or worse at odds with each other.

Now for Ontario. In February the CBA Young Lawyers released the 11th report in the Legal Futures Initiative, *Do Law Differently: Futures for Young Lawyers*.

The report fingers four main reasons that are killing jobs for full-time lawyers:

- An end to lawyers' strict monopoly providing legal services
- Competitive pressures
- Technological advances
- Access challenges (the rising cost of legal services putting legal services out of the reach of average consumers)

Other skills and abilities the report identifies future lawyers should have are data management; emotional intelligence; entrepreneurial spirit (I couldn't agree more); financial literacy; network building (business development more than ever); process improvement; professional conduct; strategic thinking (I teach my clients how to become more targeted, strategic and tactical); and technological proficiency. I would add my two cents and say that these skills and abilities are not only important for "future" lawyers, but lawyers practising right now.

But are law schools offering curricula that reflect these needs? Do continuing legal education offerings cover these topics? Why is it that marketing and business training do not qualify for continuing professional development hours? I think there is a serious lack of adequate training to prepare future lawyers for the realities they are facing.

I will never forget a keynote speech made by Guy Kawasaki at the Legal Marketing Association conference in Los Angeles in 2008. To paraphrase, he talked about innovation. He used ice and refrigeration as his analogy. In the beginning people would go out up north and cut ice and bring it back to town. Next came ice factories where they would manufacture ice. What followed was the ice box;

and finally the refrigerator. But what was most interesting about his story was that at each new innovation the people involved in the previous offering were not involved in creating the new innovation. Look at Apple and Blackberry: At one point would you have ever considered that a different company would come along and outdo Blackberry?

The CBA report says the legal market is going to end up looking like every other market. Do you want to be a part this innovation or become a dinosaur? What's going on in the legal industry has already happened in every other industry and the legal industry is just finally catching up. Now that you are less "protected," consumers are wiser; there are far more choices, access to information has increased, there is considerably more competition, not just from other lawyers but other service providers as well, this all adds up to a "perfect storm."

All of these challenges can also present opportunities. You can be different. You can stand out from your competition. Have the courage to stand out. Have the courage to do it differently and be a part of the innovation that is well under way in the legal industry.

*Gary Mitchell is the principal at On Trac Coach where he works with lawyers, law clerks and paralegals across Canada helping them to attract more clients and grow their businesses. He is the co-founder of Legal A Team, a marketing and management alliance focused on providing big firm support to smaller law firms and solo practice lawyers. Gary's second book, Raindance Two: A Blueprint for Growing your Practice is now available. He can be reached at gary@ontraccoach.com or 604-669-5235.*

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