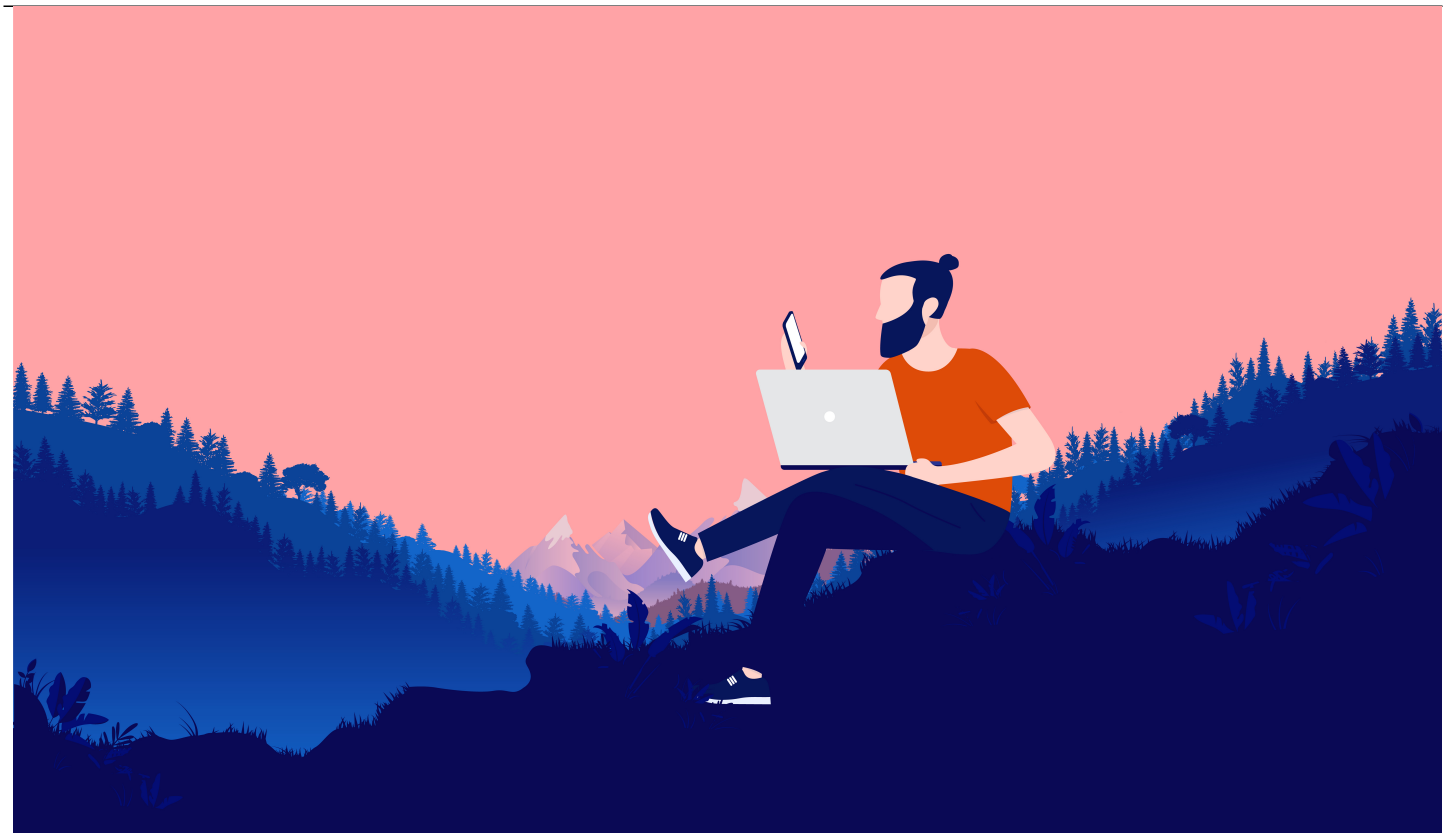
Legal Tech: How Leaders Can Support Lawyers in Remote Environments

Law Department Management

Career Development

Technology, Privacy, and eCommerce



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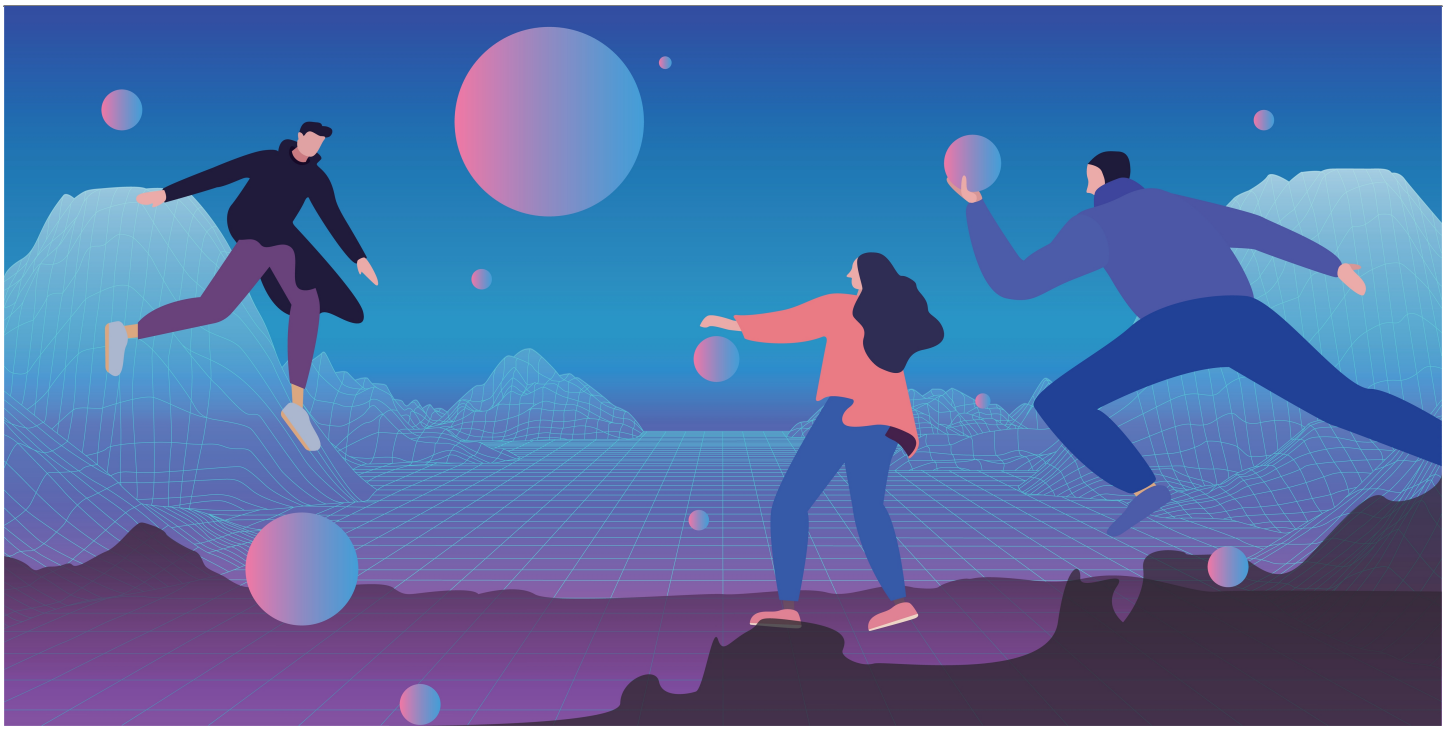
Imagine throwing on your virtual headset and joining your company's chief legal officer on a virtual golf course for monthly one-on-one meetings. That's precisely how a leader of a large tech company told me he gets to know each in-house legal team member better.

"We share ideas, goals, and challenges. Opening up avatar-to-avatar can be easier than face-to-face," he says, "and it just feels natural to have fun while also focusing on the business at hand."

Virtual golf courses are a logical next step in our transformed work environments. Eighty-seven percent of legal professionals said their workplace allows lawyers to work remotely, according to a 2022 ABA Report. About 30% of lawyers work at home nearly all the time, another 30% almost always work in the office, and 40% vary the amount of time they work at home.



Virtual reality has sweeping implications for professional interfacing. Artwork by is.a.bella / *Shutterstock.com*

This means that today's legal department leaders must find ways to keep remote and in-office workers connected, engaged, and productive without always knowing where workers are, where they will be, or who they're in touch with. Here are five helpful ways to get started:

1. Get to know people as individuals.

Today, Our personal and professional lives overlap and intersect in complex ways. We are not robots that can completely shut off at the demand of the other. For example, a divorce or a family member's illness can affect anyone's ability to focus on work tasks.

Recent graduates keep very different schedules than new parents. (*Or do they? I'm not so sure.*) Those who work remotely because of a disability may need more time to prepare for meetings. Some may struggle to concentrate on video calls because they have noisy neighbors or pets.

Whatever the situation, learning more about each team member's personal life can help increase your sensitivity to the challenges they face and the goals they want to achieve.

2. Create an open, non-judgmental workplace.

Part of getting to know your team involves creating an open workplace where people feel comfortable sharing personal stories and experiences. Ask questions in a relaxed and non-judgmental way to understand the full context of situations and challenges that arise. Becoming more sensitive to your team's needs leads to better communication, improved morale, and increased productivity.

Encourage team members to speak out if they feel mistreated. You might provide anonymous feedback forms or a secure virtual location to address difficulties. Also, promote good news and congratulate team members for their efforts, regardless of outcomes, when appropriate.

3. Intentionally design and use technology.

Be intentional in designing the technological infrastructure to support remote and collaborative work and promote usage of features that help all team members stay connected.

- Offer real-time discussion boards, automatic routing, scheduled alerts, and video meetups that help everyone stay on the same page.
- Encourage the use of shared calendars to communicate availability and coordinate schedule changes.
- Use software that creates a single source of truth for matters to avoid miscommunication and ensure teams stay on track.

4. Embrace workflow automation.

Use automated workflows to standardize team processes. Nearly 7 of 10 legal department leaders say establishing the right processes is essential to achieving meaningful results after transformational change. Further,

- 62% of departments will invest in automation,
- 54% will dedicate efforts to performance analytics, and
- 46% plan to improve legal project management.

Each of these efforts helps form critical connections for remote employees who may fear that, because they are out of sight, they are also out of mind. For example, automated matter intake can remove location bias using analytics to send each matter to the lawyer with the most appropriate skills, experience, preference, and time for cost-effective handling.

5. Promote a sense of community and foster relationships.

Make a special effort to include everyone equally in the ways you promote community and foster relationships.

- Keep everyone informed through group messages that explain the why, when, and how behind decisions.
- Develop a single online system for all remote and in-office employees to report work status updates.
- Offer breakout discussion rooms during virtual employee meetings to give smaller groups the space to share thoughts and ask questions.

Team-building exercises and group outings help lawyers and staff get to know each other better. Even if they're initially just joining in on the cringe factor, they're doing it together. Invite employees to join fun activities such as virtual happy hours and yoga classes. These outings help to replicate the informal conversations during lunch or coffee breaks that remote workers miss out on.

Soon we'll all take treks to virtual visits to golf courses, museums, zoos, and mountains together. Wherever they are, leaders must treat communication with remote workers with the same gravity as conversation with colleagues in hallways. Not only will it be more rewarding, but it will become even more fun as we explore more modes of virtual reality.

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She has authored numerous books, including Get on Board: Earning Your Ticket to a Corporate Board Seat, Fundamentals of Smart Contract Security and Blockchain Value: Transforming Business Models, Society, and Communities. She is working on her next books: Visual IQ for Lawyers (ABA 2024), The Rise of Product Lawyers: An Analytical Framework to Systematically Advise Your Clients Throughout the Product Lifecycle (Globe Law and Business 2024), and Legal Operations in the Age of AI and Data (Globe Law and Business 2024).