

Collaboration is Key: How Monica Zent Promotes Unity in Legal Departments

Technology, Privacy, and eCommerce



Monica Zent, the dynamic founder of Foxwordy Inc., Zentlaw, and other ventures, knows that collaboration is key. When asked about her career philosophy, Zent quotes poet Mattie Stephanek, saying “Unity is strength… when there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved.” Zent is on a lifelong mission to spread collaboration in the legal community. In fact, her current startup, Foxwordy, a digital collaboration network for lawyers, might just change how the legal industry communicates, collaborates, and connects.

Learned collaboration

Zent learned the power of collaboration early on and has cultivated her love of teamwork throughout her life. “From an early age, I played a variety of sports, both individual and team. Collaboration is something I learned about early on through sports,” Zent explains. “I was on the rowing team in college. That’s the kind of sport where collaboration must be near perfect right down to the second to ensure all the oars hit the water at the same time, keeping the boat moving swiftly through the water.”



Zent applies the same principles to business. “Over the years, I have brought what I call a ‘culture of collaboration’ to each business I’ve founded,” she says. “I started to build and leverage technology to facilitate collaboration and knowledge-sharing.”

Foxwordy: Collaboration in action

Many years later, Zent has consistently found collaboration to be an essential trait for any healthy organization. Recently, she discovered an opportunity to enhance collaboration on an industry-wide scale. She explains, “As a lifelong entrepreneur and innovator, I noticed that the legal industry was undergoing rapid change. For example, my in-house colleagues were being asked to do more work in less time and for less compensation or career enhancement.”

With the structure of legal work changing so rapidly, Zent observed the need for a solution that would help lawyers connect, collaborate, and save time. Zent’s current startup, Foxwordy, evolved from that observation. “While we often think of lawyers as facing off against one another in the courtroom, in fact lawyers are great collaborators,” she says. “Yet, in many ways, how lawyers collaborate is stuck in the past.”

She continues, “I noticed lawyers still collaborating via old-fashioned methods like phone, email, or in-person meetings, which are inefficient in today’s time-pressed legal industry.” Inspired by her previous projects, Zent realized that technology can make collaboration far more efficient for all lawyers.

After her epiphany, Zent launched Foxwordy. According to Zent, Foxwordy brings social cloud collaboration to the legal market, empowering lawyers everywhere to collaborate with colleagues within and outside their organizations. Foxwordy’s many features include anonymity, which allows lawyers to have ‘off-the-record’ conversations with their trusted colleagues, and “teams,” allowing

lawyers to collaborate with colleagues around specific topics or matters in real time. Another feature is clause collaboration, which allows lawyers to share language and edit clauses dynamically, making real-time usability a reality.

“These features evolved directly out of my real-life experiences in the legal industry, and my observations about how lawyers can benefit from collaboration that is facilitated through the convenience of easy-to-use technology,” Zent explains.

Collaboration will benefit legal departments

Collaboration is not a new concept in many other industries. In the tech industry, where Zent spends the most time, collaboration among developers on products is essential to create the best, most innovative results. While law has the same potential, lawyers need the right environment and tools.

“Lawyers can be den animals, working on their own and falling into a silo of their own creation,” Zent admits. “Pretty soon, they can’t climb out of the silo, and everyone else in the law department is stuck in their own dens.”

Zent noticed that these dens of isolation can become toxic. “That toxicity can impair the individual lawyer’s growth and career development, it can clog communication channels within the department, and, at its worst, it can create unintended obstacles to the company’s business objectives because members of its own legal team cannot get on the same page,” she says.

According to Zent, collaboration is the key to legal departments that run efficiently, mind the bottom line, drive innovative approaches to legal work, solve challenges, and achieve results. “Creating a culture of collaboration in a legal department by leveraging technology solutions will allow the department to save money on outside counsel, avoid re-inventing the wheel via more efficient knowledge-sharing, and limit attrition because people will achieve greater career satisfaction,” she explains.

Collaboration keys for legal departments

Zent recommends a number of best practices to drive greater collaboration. Mentoring and knowledge sharing is an obvious place to start. “Utilizing technology to share retained knowledge and work they have created should be at the top of the ‘must do’ list for any legal department,” says Zent. “With the increased career mobility of the in-house lawyer, coupled with the fact that lawyers are working more remotely, collecting this knowledge and information in a central location is key.”

Leveraging technology will make accomplishing this task much easier. For example, one of Foxwordy’s features helps in-house legal departments preserve the knowledge their lawyers have accumulated and spread it within the department. This avoids inefficiency and eliminates excess workflow cycles.

“For instance, if someone in a legal department is sitting down to draft a term sheet around a sensitive matter and someone else in that legal department created language that would be beneficial to use in that term sheet, discovering that would ordinarily have to happen by accident, or after sending a spam email to the entire legal department and culling through numerous responses or, if you’re lucky, trying to find it through the clunky search mechanism on your law department Wiki — if last summer’s legal intern even uploaded it to the Wiki! This is just not efficient,” explains Zent. “But this is the reality for most law departments these days. That’s why I created Foxwordy: to put

an end to this needless churn that lawyers live with daily.”

Creating cross-functional committees can be useful on matters that may impact various parts of a company, such as compliance or privacy. “I have found that rotating lawyers into different roles within their range of subject matter expertise for brief periods such as three to six months, proves highly rewarding and enriching for the individual lawyer,” Zent says.

She continues, “Opportunities for lawyers to collaborate and work directly with the business clients they support, such as spending a few months sitting with that business team in their actual office location, can also help each lawyer cultivate their own collaboration skills.”

The aesthetics of a department and its layout can further enhance collaboration. According to Zent, legal departments could take cues from trendy startup offices. “Try open floor plans, glass conference rooms, video chat areas, and comfortable lounges,” she says.

Ultimately, Zent believes that collaboration must start at the top. “If the leadership in a legal department understands the benefits of collaboration and talks about it with the department, this can help to ensure that everyone falls in line supporting a healthy, collaborative and productive law department culture,” she explains.

On a rowing team, the coxswain is responsible for steering the other rowers and ensuring that their collaboration is on point. Likewise, legal department leadership is responsible for creating a culture of collaboration and providing the tools to steer the department in the right direction.

Although collaboration may not come naturally to some legal departments, Zent is optimistic that tools like Foxwordy can help legal departments see the benefits of collaboration. By leveraging technology, encouraging teamwork, and maintaining strong leadership, rapidly evolving in-house departments can enjoy a successful transition to a culture of collaboration — and all the “wonderful things” that come with it.

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Olga V. Mack is a fellow at CodeX, The Stanford Center for Legal Informatics, and a Generative AI Editor at law.MIT. Mack shares her views in her columns on ACC Docket, Newsweek, Bloomberg, VentureBeat, Above the Law, and many other publications.

Mack is also an award-winning (such as the prestigious ACC 2018 Top 10 30-Somethings and ABA 2022 Women of Legal Tech) general counsel, operations professional, startup advisor, public speaker, adjunct professor, and entrepreneur. She co-founded SunLaw, an organization dedicated to preparing women in-house attorneys to become general counsels and legal leaders, and WISE to help female law firm partners become rainmakers.

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