


# The T-Shaped Lawyer: Ask Yourself These Crucial Career Questions

**Career Development**



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An open letter to all corporate lawyers,

You have a problem. Or at least I suspect that you do. You may be earning good money and happy in your role. You may even be told by your boss, and by your colleagues, that you are doing a good job. But here are five questions for your consideration:

1. Would you like these colleagues to value you and your work more than they do now? If so, do you know how to achieve that outcome?

2. Do you feel that some of your work lacks meaning and/or adds little value? Do you have a clear plan for how to do less of this type of work?

3. Are you adapting your work, not just augmenting it with technology, for the future? If not, do you have a clear idea what different work that you could do?

4. Is your professional development preparing you sufficiently for whatever the future may hold? If not, do you know how to be more adaptable and marketable?

5. Are you thriving — realizing your full potential — or is there more you can, and would like to,

contribute to your legal team and your company?

## Redefining legal leadership: impact, innovation, and adaptability

If you are a leader in your legal department, you may have made changes to enhance efficiency and save costs. You may have even won awards for that and received favorable reviews by your legal, business, and functional colleagues. However, here are some additional questions for you to consider:

- Are the changes that you have made to people or mainly to processes and systems?
- To what extent has the business benefited from these changes, or is the beneficiary primarily the legal department?
- Does the company really appreciate all the work done by the legal team? If not, is the problem that your business colleagues “just don’t get it” or is it perhaps a signal that much of the work being currently done isn’t making enough of an impact?
- What about your people? To what extent do they understand the changing landscape for lawyers and the reasons why they might need or want to change their work and their capabilities to do new and different work? Have you changed, or do you plan to change, the work that your people do and their capabilities to do new and different work? Will the changes be sufficient to attract, retain, and develop top talent and to prepare your people for whatever the future holds?
- Is adding more value one of the top priorities for you and the legal team? Do you have strategies and plans for how to deliver significantly more value over and above any efficiency gains and cost savings?
- Is innovation a priority? If so, do you have plans for how the legal team can innovate not just for your department but for the company as a whole?
- Do you have a vision? If so, is it to be a “better,” or “the best,” legal team or something like that? To what extent is realizing, or even aspiring, to that vision going to address any of the concerns raised by the above questions? Are you aware of any alternative visions or directions the lawyers and your legal team could take?
- Do your external advisors understand, and can they help you answer, these crucial questions? Are their interests aligned with your interest to address these concerns? If not, do you know where to seek guidance and support?

If these questions do raise concerns for you, as a leader or an individual contributor, then do you believe that you will address them on your current path, or might it be necessary to consider a new direction?

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Will you stay the course or venture down a new path? Artwork by vulcano / *Shutterstock.com*

I believe that merely improving your current way of working, or being more efficient, will not be sufficient for you to add significantly more value for your company or address the above concerns. To achieve these outcomes, you will need a new path, a new paradigm, a new vision. My book*, A New Vision for Corporate Lawyers*, explains why this is so and makes the case for a very specific and substantial change. Specifically, to change your work and your capabilities to work in new ways and to do different work. I call it human transformation.

## Embracing human transformation

Human transformation may not be in the headlines as much as digital transformation. In fact, not many are focused on it at all. However, it is at least as important, if not more so, especially as generative AI and other “increasingly capable machines” relentlessly encroach on traditional legal work. In a rapidly changing world, where many things are outside of your control, two things every lawyer has some level of control over is the work they do and their own professional development.

The book – *A New Vision for Corporate Lawyers: Part 1 of the T-Shaped Lawyer Series* is available for free at here, or you can reach me at info@alternativelylegal.com.

If you are reading this article, then you probably need no convincing about why such a change is necessary. However not all your legal colleagues will be at that stage. Change management

principles tell us that the first step in any significant change that involves a person changing their behavior is for that person to accept that there is a compelling reason to change.

## Future state

The next step in change management is to articulate a Future State Vision. To put it simply, before you sign up for this change you would, understandably, want a clear idea of how you could work differently and what new work you could be doing. General and vague expressions like “higher value work” or “more strategic stuff” are not good enough. The next article in this series will provide you with a very clear picture of this new vision and the central idea to this vision may surprise you.

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After a 25-year career working in the United States, Hong Kong, Australia, the United Kingdom, and Switzerland in various regional general counsel and compliance roles with Sun Microsystems and Citrix, Peter Connor established AlternativelyLegal to provide unique training and consulting for in-house lawyers.