

The T-Shaped Lawyer: The Language of Change and the Importance of Precision

Career Development



Banner artwork by Bohbeh / *Shutterstock.com*

Lawyers are so precise when it comes to the law, whether it is drafting a contract, writing a legal opinion, or interpreting a statute.

Yet, when it comes to changing yourself and your work, lawyers are typically imprecise in their use of terminology and their understanding of key concepts.

For example, many:

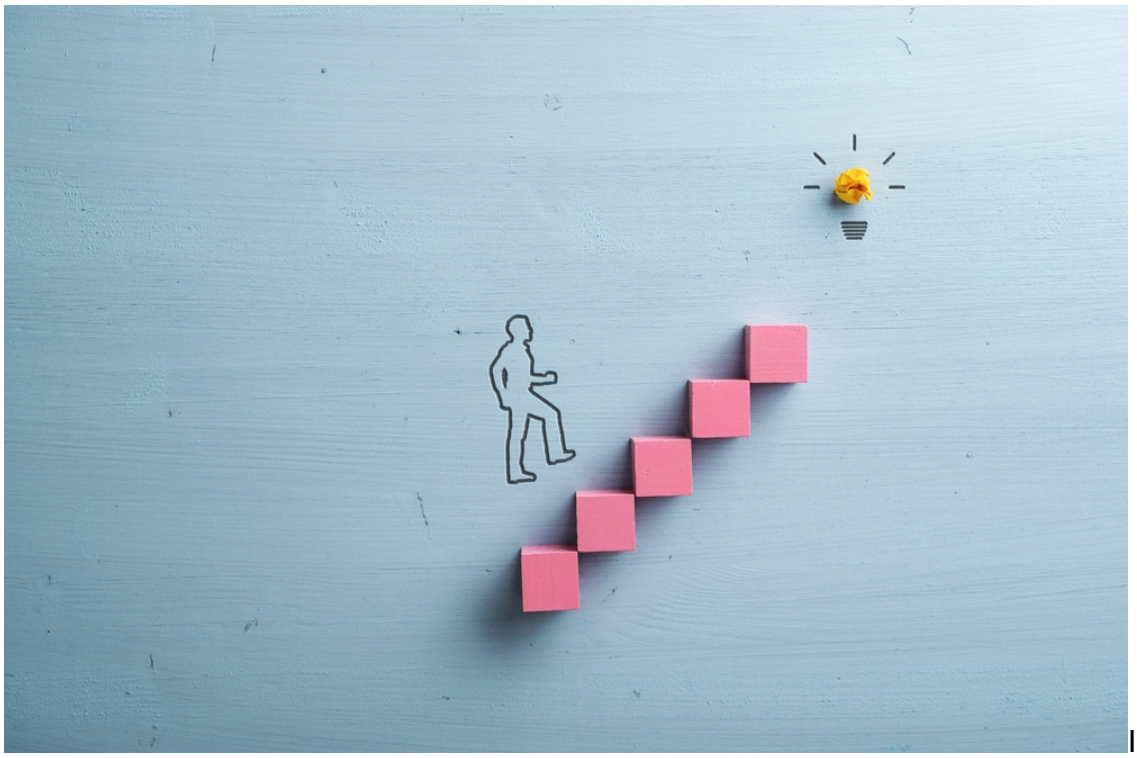
- Fail to clarify clear *objectives for change;*
- Don't have a clear *vision* or even understand what it is and why it is so crucial to change;
- Use vague terms like "*trusted advisor,"* "*higher value,"* and "*more strategic"* which are not that helpful without further clarification;
- Use *innovation* to describe doing almost anything differently, whereas that term should really be reserved for change that adds value especially for the business, not just the legal department; and
- Use *transformation* to describe any improvement, whereas it really means a substantial change from one thing to something different — which may be necessary to achieve your change objectives.

When it comes to change, does being precise matter?

Precision in the language of legal practice transformation is just as crucial as in the language of law itself. Without this precision it will be difficult, if not impossible, to effect meaningful change. This is because your perception of change may differ from the actual changes, and as a result, your efforts may not yield the best outcomes.

> Precision in the language of legal practice transformation is just as crucial as in the language of law itself.

It is for this reason that I have tried to clearly spell out in my T-Shaped Lawyer book series and in the last three articles (Part 1, Part 2, Part 3) in the Docket:



Innovation without a personal vision is like a ship without a compass. Artwork by Gajus / *Shutterstock.com*

- *Why* you may want/need to fundamentally change yourself and your work.
- *What* specific vision might help you to realize that objective.
- *How* to achieve that objective by following a framework that, for individuals, includes skills but also specific competencies, qualities, mindsets, and knowledge.

To be more precise, if you take the time to read the T-Shaped Lawyer series books and consider these questions, you will realize that:

- You and your work are the two things you have some ability to influence in a world where

increasingly many things are outside your control or influence.
- You may have many different reasons to change yourself and your work but seeking to add more value for clients is the paramount change objective that will address many of those reasons.
- Providing business advice, not just legal advice, and doing business work, not just legal work, for the benefit of the business, not just the legal department, is the most effective way to add more value for clients (what I call business for the business or *B4B work*).
- To do B4B work well you need to change yourself by:
    - Becoming a businessperson, not just a lawyer, and you can do that by adopting a Businessperson Mindset™ and engaging in business partnering and business leadership, which is more than being business minded, more than having business acumen and more than being a business partner or having good relations with your business colleagues.
    - Developing not just some random “soft” skills but a specific set of mindsets, skills, competencies, qualities, and knowledge as explained in the T-Shaped Lawyer Framework, the subject of the soon to be published second book.
    - Using these capabilities to do B4B work, not just legal work.
- Transforming your work and yourself in this manner need not compromise your independence or ethical standards. In fact, it may boost your influence on business decisions due to a closer relationship with the business, enabling early intervention.

Even if you do not agree with this new direction for you and your work, hopefully it will encourage you to be more precise when it comes to considering your career objectives and what you need to change to achieve those objectives.

Advance your career with ACC's mini-MBA program.

How can you be more precise?

Just like with drafting or reviewing a legal document, when you are considering changing yourself and your work you should:

- Take time to carefully read and consider key discussions, articles or books;
- Critically analyze suggested changes and challenge your own assumptions;
- Reflect, don’t jump to a conclusion and take time to reach a decision; and
- Choose your words carefully when it comes to discussing this change.

I realize that your work can be overwhelming and leaves you with very little time to get your tasks done, let alone follow changes happening in the corporate legal industry, read different perspectives, and consider changes to yourself or your work. But, as an individual, is there anything more important from a professional perspective than what work you do and your capabilities to do different kinds of work?

> Your company and legal colleagues can play an important role here, but ultimately, you are the one who needs to take responsibility to determine what you are seeking from your work and the changes you need to make to achieve those objectives.

If you don’t pay attention to your professional capabilities and your work, no one else will. Your company and legal colleagues can play an important role here, but ultimately, you are the one who needs to take responsibility to determine what you are seeking from your work and the changes you need to make to achieve those objectives. As you do that, remember to be precise and clear. That way you are more likely to achieve those objectives, thrive, and have a successful and fulfilling career.

Join the ACC community today!

Disclaimer: The information in any resource in this website should not be construed as legal advice or as a legal opinion on specific facts, and should not be considered representing the views of its authors, its authors’ employers, its sponsors, and/or ACC. These resources are not intended as a definitive statement on the subject addressed. Rather, they are intended to serve as a tool providing practical guidance and references for the busy in-house practitioner and other readers.

Peter Connor



Founder and CEO

AlternativelyLegal

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.