



Mindful Collaboration: 5 Factors to Meet Changing Legal Department Demands

Law Department Management

Technology, Privacy, and eCommerce



It was my second year as a corporate associate. My husband found me sitting on the floor in the middle of the night, heavily pregnant, surrounded by boxes of legal documents. I was clutching a growing list of questions in one hand and a crisscrossed to-do list in the other.

"This does not look like a healthy pregnancy or lifestyle," he said.

At the time, I joked, "My daughter is learning law by osmosis."

But thankfully, that story is now just one example of the solitary, disconnected, and burdensome legal work methods we have left behind.

Today, corporate counsel rely on integrated software solutions and powerful legal tech platforms to easily access and share information, data, and resources across the organization. Some of the most adventurous counsel collaborate with partners in the supply chain, clients, and even competitors.

But what makes legal technology effective today? How can you build a legal technology system that supports healthier, more mindful, and more collaborative workstyles while still enhancing your company's competitiveness? Start by considering these five factors.

1. Attract and retain top talent

We hear that Millennials and Gen Y workers prefer companies that foster innovation. It's said younger generations seek to apply their creativity and continually learn new skills. The truth is that most people, regardless of age, enjoy when technology eliminates drudgery tasks such as email ping-pong to schedule meetings or the tedious extraction of data points from hundreds of spreadsheets.

What to do

Platforms with AI-enabled features can unearth data to help you better analyze existing processes. Seek to automate low-value tasks and optimize workflows built off the best of your systems that already work.

Why

Employees gain more time to increase productivity and engage in higher-level work. Happier, more engaged employees serve as brand ambassadors that naturally attract top talent.

2. Foster simultaneous collaboration

Simultaneous collaboration brings the right people together at the same time to get more work done faster and smarter. For example, eDiscovery and contract management platforms unify work efforts across locations, departments, internal and external legal teams, and third parties.

In contrast, during sequential work, we may work on the same project or document, but our activities occur in individual steps, often over time. (e.g., You draft a contract. You email it to counsel. They redline their edits and email it back. You respond to their edits. Hours or days pass between each step.)

What to do

Leverage cloud-based tools and platforms that allow you to share resources and documents and work with others in real-time. Increase understanding with tools that record the decision-making process in one, easily accessible location.

Why

Among many other benefits, simultaneous collaboration tears down information silos. Bringing together knowledge and data from multiple disciplines and sources encourages a global perspective of challenges and a more holistic awareness of their solutions.

3. Safeguard employees

The [2020 ACC Chief Legal Officers Survey](#) reveals that the top concerns for most chief legal officers include data breaches, protecting corporate data, and information privacy. Yet, Clyde & Co. recently [reported](#), “Despite the high perceived risk of cyberattack, 42 percent of general counsel and 33 percent of board directors do not have a crisis management plan in place to respond to attacks.”

Lawyers are increasingly responsible for ensuring companies implement and employees adhere to safe data security standards. You may need to establish protective measures such as:

- Breach notification procedures;
- Incident response plans;
- Employee training for safe digital practices; and
- Standard practices to ensure technology partners keep up with data security standards

What to do

As lawyers, this especially we cannot do alone. We need input from managers and employees on how technology is used. We need the wisdom and experience of IT and data security specialists to understand potential scenarios and preventative measures.

Why

The ACC CLO Survey also found that 75 percent of CLOs report that executives almost always look to them for input on strategic decisions and risk areas. Just as we need the help of others, they need our protective instincts and legal guidance in this arena.

4. Enable teamwork

Today’s workforce is increasingly digital, as evidenced by companies’ shift to work from home during coronavirus lockdowns. We work from anywhere, anytime, supported by a plethora of mobile devices and cloud-based apps. But that doesn’t mean we’re disconnected.

What to do

Look for cloud-based project management tools and legal tech platforms with intuitive dashboards to help you monitor cases, track projects, and stay on top of who is doing what and why.

Why

The resulting enhanced visibility doesn’t just help you; it also improves the team’s ownership of work. Team members feel obliged to keep everyone informed of their progress. Most importantly,

they see how their work contributes to company goals. Successful outcomes are driven by people who feel as if their work has meaning.

5. Respect the right to disconnect

Our 24/7 access to technology and each other is a double-edged sword. The legal industry is slowly adopting more appreciation for a healthier work/life balance. I, along with many others, want us to embrace the concept much faster.

What to do

Give employees the ability to disconnect and respect their need to do so.

Why

With the easy ability to reach anyone anywhere, at any time, also comes the great responsibility not to. If you can't trust that your team will contribute at the appropriate times, it's probably time to evaluate its structure.

Businesses thrive through mindful collaboration

As my husband pointed out, casting aside health concerns of working day and night was not — and never will be — sustainable. Fortunately, the boxes of paper and hand-written lists have given way to tech-enabled platforms and integrated software tools. Technology now better aligns our work efforts. Happier employees discover more creative business solutions and strategies, and business thrives through safely expanded collaboration.

As for me, the advantages of using technology ultimately led to a much healthier work/life balance. It has been such an integral part of my life and career. As for my daughter, she carries her computer everywhere, collaborates with her peers digitally, and does not have a single paper on her desk. While I am not sure if I succeeded in teaching her law by osmosis, it seems like she has absorbed the trends to digitize and collaborate.

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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.

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).