



How Your Willingness to Embrace Technology Enhances Soft Skills that Boost Your Competitive Edge

Technology, Privacy, and eCommerce



Whether you're a lawyer looking to get ahead in a law firm, in-house legal department, or elsewhere, building your soft skills enhances the value you bring to the table in more important ways than you may realize.

We hear a lot about technology increasingly commoditizing legal services. Yes, automation is taking over more routine legal tasks. Yes, artificial intelligence (AI) will greatly simplify activities such as document review and legal research, which used to burn through billable hours.

But technology can't hold a candle to what lawyers can achieve using soft skills such as creativity, empathy, and collaborative abilities. That's because soft skills help lawyers recognize and solve the modern business challenges that technology won't address any time soon. You can even embrace the use of technologies to amplify your ability to use your soft skills to boost your competitive edge even further. Let's examine how, as we look at three essential skills that help lawyers get ahead today.

A commitment to lifelong learning

The legal profession has always required a commitment to lifelong learning. Consider summer internships, mentoring while rising through the ranks in firms and in-house, and continuing legal education requirements.

Using, managing, and assessing the use of technology requires the same commitment to lifelong learning. Technology is everywhere, and it is always changing and advancing. Your technology literacy level determines how well you use and understand the use of technology tools to solve many of today's sophisticated business challenges.

For example, lawyers often must continually re-evaluate how an organization's legal team, employees, customers, business partners, and competitors are using technology. Only then can they accurately assess how ongoing technological change may affect a company's operations and objectives.

Your eagerness to continually increase your competence helps you deliver more strategic legal advice based on knowledge rather than hunches and hypotheses. Informed advice is always more impartial, optimal, and precise.

Even so, no one can learn everything about all technology everywhere. This is one reason the ability to always be learning will help you stay competitive and impactful.

Embracing collaboration and diversity of thought

Lawyers have always consulted with experts to deal with thorny legal issues. Now, lawyers need to consult with experts in a growing number of fields such as data security, eDiscovery, innovation, psychology, and technology to address clients' modern needs.

The ever-increasing complexities of legal matters often call for the collective wisdom and experience of interdisciplinary teams. Increased globalization and transparency also require that lawyers work more closely with other lawyers internally and externally, as well as with clients, regulatory and compliance officials, and others.

Technology helps lawyers prioritize collaboration and build cross-functional teams. For example, cloud-based tools such as instant messaging and online discussion boards make it much easier to provide input and collect feedback. Many software platforms allow 24/7 access to centralized information and communications that keep all stakeholders up-to-date with the latest developments.

But it's how you take advantage of today's more collaborative technologies that determines whether you lead teams that adopt effective problem-solving strategies. Lawyers who seek input and feedback from others and appreciate diverse thinking inspire others to perform at their highest levels. By facilitating interdepartmental collaboration, you support the development of innovative solutions that mark you as a legal leader to count on.

You can collaborate with the smartest members of Mensa and still not get anywhere unless you also actively listen to and empathize with others.

Active listening and responding with empathy

Lawyers are often fantastic listeners. We learn to ask questions designed to elicit revealing details and to look beyond our assumptions to examine a situation from many angles.

Active listening and empathy skills go even further to include: (1) understanding other people's perspectives, and (2) appreciating that others' viewpoints are *both* valid and important.

For example, a lawyer may analyze past data and create what they think is a useful contract template. But if they haven't actively listened to input from the company's department leaders, the template probably won't address real user needs, and employees won't use it.

It's okay to acknowledge that your individual perspective is limited. Technology helps you prioritize listening because many tools significantly speed, simplify, and clarify communications. Lawyers who genuinely listen with an empathetic ear will be able to see more risks and opportunities from different angles and develop genuinely productive solutions.

Build your soft skills to get ahead

This is not even close to an exhaustive list of the personal traits that will help lawyers get ahead now and in the future. Technological advancements will continue to change how lawyers work, just as they will continue to alter the types of legal services clients need.

Embracing technology can help you listen, learn, communicate, and collaborate more effectively. But technology can't match the value you bring to clients because only you have the soft skills needed to help solve modern business challenges.

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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).