

Becoming AI Savvy Isn't About the Tech, It's About the Right Mindset

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Becoming an AI-savvy lawyer takes more than mastery of the technology. The tools change constantly, and today's leading AI-driven product or source of information may be obsolete next year. Rather, becoming AI-savvy is also about building the right mindset. The fundamentals of practicing law and working with clients still matter, and human judgment, empathy and communication are the differentiators. This is particularly true as AI becomes more deeply embedded in the practice of law and business.

Several traits distinguish today's AI-savvy lawyers. They are curious, pragmatic, and understand both the potential and the limits of AI. When everyone has access to the same tools, ethical awareness, and strong human skills, such as judgment, communication, empathy, and client relationship management, it will set lawyers and law firms apart from their competition. To capture this differentiation opportunity, law firms must focus on cultural change and standardized competence. Today's AI ecosystem is more often marked by fragmented adoption, a lack of communication between the teams charged with introducing new technology and those responsible for training, and the neglected need for changes to



long-held systems and billing processes. Overcoming these challenges will require effort and thoughtful planning by both law firms and individual lawyers.

That doesn't mean expertise with AI tools isn't important. Even as traditional legal expertise remains essential, technological fluency and adaptability are becoming more valuable. To ensure attorneys are versed in and comfortable with new advancements, law firms and lawyers should seek out training that fits into current workflows and connects tools to actual use cases. Seeing concrete benefits will help make the business case for busy professionals to engage with AI, as well as training programs on its use.

Successful training programs must take into account the reality of attorneys' schedules and time demands. Along with embedding training into daily workflows, sessions that are short and practical are more likely to be embraced. Now that many firms and attorneys have become more comfortable with the basics of GenAI, they should also explore more simulations and personalized learning programs that speak to ways individual attorneys prefer to learn and what matters in their specific practice areas.

This is a challenge for many firms which are adopting AI but whose progress can be uneven and fragmented. Today's solutions are often siloed across teams, and policies or governance frameworks struggle to keep pace with technology. In many cases, Innovation and Professional Development teams are still trying to determine how to work together and merge their expertise in a way that can be consistently rolled out across multiple offices and practice groups. Improved communication can allow these functions to more thoughtfully approach investments in their people and tools.

This cross-functional work is also hampered by firms' ongoing efforts to introduce policies and guardrails that quickly become outdated or remain incomplete. Without consistent training and shared standards, law firms will increasingly struggle as the field continues to change. Learning how to use AI isn't the only challenge. The so-called "learning paradox" is another area firms are grappling with. AI accelerates work but risks reducing the time juniors spend developing foundational skills. For a profession that has long relied on the current approach of partners guiding and instructing associates, along with the model of the billable hour, these are significant changes with no clear outcome. The future success

of a law firm will depend on its next generation of lawyers being AI-savvy and well-versed in client relations, business development, and other essential professional skills.

Of course, lawyers at any stage in their career shouldn't expect their firms to provide all the effort. By taking ownership of their personal professional development, lawyers at all levels of experience can better position themselves for ongoing success, even as the technology and business of law practices change and evolve. The legal leaders of tomorrow will require many skills well outside of the traditional legal curriculum.

AI-savvy lawyering is already something that clients are starting to demand. The technology is capable; the challenge now is cultural and organizational change. In many cases, the lawyers themselves – not the technology – are the main constraint. Consider this data point from the 2025 Blickstein Group Law Firm COO Survey, which surveyed senior administrators at law firms across North America: When asked to identify obstacles to implementing change, the most common response among survey participants was the partners themselves, not lack of time or budget.

That must change if firms and attorneys want to remain competitive. And that is why the AI-savvy lawyer will be defined by the most human of skills, not just the newest tools.

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