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Junior lawyers will need to be fast-tracked to provide value

The role of the lawyer in future will be to provide high-end intellectual capital (IC), give advice and manage resources – clients, people and finances. The grunt work (process and content) is and will be done by information technology (IT) and artificial intelligence (AI).

Arguably, market forces are such that every lawyer is going to have to contribute value, otherwise the business economics will not stack up. Most firms will not be able to sustain their present costs for junior lawyers.

The problem is, how can junior lawyers of the future become truly skilled in advising and be of significant value when it has traditionally taken four, five or more years of post-qualification experience (PQE) to reach this stage?

Fast-tracking junior lawyers

The reality is that junior lawyers will need to fast-track their way to high-end IC value, which partners (and clients) appreciate cannot be done by IT and AI. They will need to be fast-tracked in commercial nous, business savvy, soft skills, emotional intelligence and IC. These are fundamental traits already displayed by the 'super lawyer'.

Firms will continue to become increasingly selective in their super lawyers of the future because the evidence, reality and necessity for outsourcing and commoditisation are overwhelming and set to increase. Annual trainee intake will only reflect long-term business planning.

Junior lawyers will need to be quickly marketable, 'value' able (valuable) and,



ultimately, have an edge. Unless they can become truly valuable, they will become unemployable and/or expendable, as anything that can be commoditised and outsourced will be.

Junior lawyers must get 'there' quicker. This can be done by investing in the short, medium and long-term in the training and development of junior lawyers. Firms should develop a properly structured and highly organised training programme in the relevant skills. This should dovetail with the individual's desired career progression and align with the firm's vision, strategy and plan.

The focus must be on upping the ante on business sense, commercial nous, business management techniques, managing resources, leadership and emotional intelligence. Lawyers will need to learn how to market, brand and sell themselves so that clients understand and appreciate their value.

I believe this investment in both time and money should come from a mix of the following: the firm, legal education (institutional and external consultants) and/or the individuals themselves who must take responsibility for their own development and success.

Lawyers must get out there: business and commercial acumen are only truly learned by interacting, engaging and getting involved. Social networking (offline and online) is one important step in achieving this.

I also advocate a move toward horizontal structures, where niche expertise and non-technical skills are valued and rewarded.

The long-term success of a firm is reliant on maintaining a pipeline of highly-skilled lawyers. In a legal world where efficiency and value is king – and a business world where extraordinary service, business savvy and appreciation of value is king – if a lawyer is not a 'super lawyer' of value then he will end up being either unemployable/redundant at worst, or a check-out Charlie at best. Junior lawyers will have to get on the fast track or face being shunted off the rails. 

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