

## When Knowledge Is the Differentiator

The successful law firm in the year 2020 has withstood a dramatic period of declining profits, increased competition, growth in outsourced legal services, headcount reductions, radically changing workflows and roles, Baby Boomer “brain drain,” and a rapid culture shift as a new generation of media-savvy Millennials became lawyers and clients. In response, the successful firm has leveraged innovation, agility and technology to build efficiencies across the firm’s people and processes.

Performance has been crucial to ultimate success. Each worker has been equipped with the tools, skills and information necessary to perform in a fast-paced, highly efficient environment while still delivering high quality legal work product to clients. But, it didn’t happen overnight. And, it didn’t come easily. The successful law firm in 2020 had to unlearn the old, create new ways of being successful and meeting new client demands, all while the world around it was rapidly changing.

Many experts speculate that, by 2020, timely access to knowledge will be a key differentiator for successful organizations. The knowledge of their employees and the access their employees have to answers and information in their moments of need will make for increased and agile performance in a world where most workers are overloaded with too much information and too few filters. Knowledge management (KM) professionals are well aware of this and are actively developing ways to cultivate and manage the knowledge-based assets of their firms.

### NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING PROFESSIONALS

Training/learning professionals also are responsible for disseminating knowledge and ‘know-how’ across the firm, and yet the traditional ways of doing so will not be timely or relevant enough for the firm of 2020. This is an opportunity for learning professionals to innovate and bring new value to their firms. In fact, in a recent Fast Company (FC Expert) Blog, blogger Sam Herring of Intrepid Learning Solutions predicted that the years leading up to 2020 may be coined “The Learning Decade”

because of the intense value learning will bring to tomorrow’s organizations.

In today’s law firms, the technology training efforts are focused primarily on rollout training, new hire orientation, ongoing training classes and the development of learning content for reference guides or e-learning modules. The traditional formal training model that we’re so accustomed to puts the trainer at the center of all knowledge. It views the

classroom as the place where all knowledge is transferred, and it assumes that if the learner is not attending classes or e-learning events, he must not be learning.

The opposite is true. In fact, learning is continuous. While the instructor-led training events remain an important piece of organized learning, firms that are not tapping the 80 to 90 percent of all learning that happens outside of the classroom are missing an opportunity. Today, users get their technology how-to questions

**“By 2020, timely access to knowledge will be a key differentiator for successful organizations.”**

answered in a number of ways that are managed by learning professionals through on-call trainers, helpdesk, e-learning, quick reference guides and classroom events. However, they also get many questions answered informally through Google searches, websites, trial-and-error experience, and information shared with coworkers and friends.

Tomorrow's learning efforts must put the learner at the center of all knowledge. Whether learners seek legal know-how, technological know-how or process know-how, they need quick and easy access to the information in their moments of need. Learners of tomorrow need to be "agile learners," learners who can continue to acquire new knowledge and skills to stay ahead in a quickly changing market. These learners are self-directed. They learn fast, they share what they learn, and they adapt quickly to new processes and workflows, often defining those processes for others. In 2020, learning equals working and working equals learning. They are synonymous. This is "next-generation learning" in law firms.

Learning is also becoming more "socialized." This learner-controlled, real-time and sometimes viral learning is consumed in the moment of need. The learner expects relevancy beyond the one-size-fits-all content that is often delivered in today's classroom. Social connections are made through blogging, chatting and tweeting. Also, by seeking and finding experts, and then sharing knowledge, real-world experiences, and information about best practices through wikis, video blogs and testimonials, learning becomes a continuous and collaborative process. By leveraging social technologies, learning professionals can extend connections beyond the physical confines of the firm, and support learners anytime and anywhere.

### SUPPORTING LEARNERS WHEN THEY NEED IT MOST

The role that learning professionals will play in this "new normal" of rapid knowledge seeking and learning agility is to provide the practices and tools learners need, individually and collectively, for efficient work performance. In the learning industry, this is often referred to as performance support — supporting learners when they need support the most. Conrad Gottfredson and Bob Mosher, in their book "Innovative Performance Support" define these five moments of learning need:

- **New:** *When people are learning something for the first time.* Think about when Microsoft Word was new to firms, or when Matter Centricity was introduced for document management. Concepts, workflows and tools were new. By 2020, firms will have strategically grown into new practice areas and new service offerings, may bring in lateral hires and may be involved in transatlantic or global mergers. These types of changes will invariably bring about new systems and new roles, which must be learned.
- **More:** *When people expand on what they have learned and need to learn more.* In today's firms, ongoing training programs have been developed to meet this need. In 2020, the successful law firm will be focused on mastering and leveraging existing technologies. Users today only use a small portion of what is truly available to them. CIOs recognize this as an area for strategic improvement in their firms.
- **Change:** *When people are learning a new way of doing something that may require them to change skills that are deeply ingrained in their practices, or when a process or workflow changes.* An example of this would be the introduction of the new Ribbon user interface in Office 2007 and Office 2010. In 2020, some users may be in changing roles, or having to change the processes they follow to get their work done as part of a larger efficiency initiative.
- **Apply:** *When people are at the point that they need to act on what they have learned.* This is where learners are trying to remember what was taught (new skill or process). This is also where learners start to adapt their workflows and processes and adopt the new technologies. If learning professionals fail here, user adoption drops, and people start to fall back on old processes and habits. In 2020, this is where learning has to be accessible outside of the classroom or training event. It has to be readily available when learners are applying the knowledge and recalling what they need to do.
- **Solve:** *When things don't work as expected or problems arise.* In most firms, this is where the call to the helpdesk comes in, or the 'shout out' to a colleague for help. If success doesn't come quickly, then frustration is the common response and learners may just give up. Accessible solutions need to be the norm in 2020.

# BEST PRACTICES

Good performance support means having an appropriate learning asset in the right context available to the learner during his moment of need. The following table lists possible learning assets and how and when to recommend using each asset.

## Explanation of Terms

- **Synchronous Learning:** learning in real time with an expert or instructor
- **Asynchronous Learning:** learning on one's own time
- **Instructor-Driven:** produced or developed by an instructor
- **Learner-Driven:** produced or developed by learners
- **Adaptability:** how quickly the asset can be adapted to incorporate new or changing information
- **Moment of Need:** corresponding to the five moments previously explained

Learning Asset	Explanation	Synchronous/ Asynchronous	Instructor-/ Learner- Driven	Adaptability	Moment of Need
Blogs	Produced by Peers or SMEs	Asynchronous	Either	Rapid to adapt	More, Apply
Coaching/Mentoring	One-on-one guided learning	Synchronous	Either	Adapt in real time	All
Consultants	Business analysts or performance consultants who prescribe tools, skills and processes	Synchronous	Instructor	Slower to adapt	New, Change, More
E-Learning	Online tutorials	Asynchronous	Instructor	Slower to adapt	More, Apply
FAQs	Frequently asked questions list	Asynchronous	Either	Slower to adapt	New, Solve
Instructor-led (ILT)	Classroom or virtual classroom	Synchronous	Instructor	Slower to adapt	New, More
Job Aids	Documented processes and how-to's	Asynchronous	Either	Slower to adapt	Change, Apply
Learning Portals & Social Networks	Online learning community for collaboration and sharing	Asynchronous	Both	Adapt in real time	Change, More, Apply, Solve
Microblogs	Like Twitter, may be used for very short announcements and tips	Asynchronous	Either	Adapt in real time	Change, Apply, Solve
Online Chats	On-demand live help	Synchronous	Instructor	Adapt in real time	Apply, Solve
Peer Experts	Designated peers as experts or SMEs	Synchronous	Learner	Adapt in real time	All
Recorded Webinars and Podcasts	Recordings of training events	Asynchronous	Either	Slower to adapt	More, Apply
Reference Materials	Quick reference guides	Asynchronous	Instructor	Slower to adapt	Apply
Virtual Worlds and Games	Augmented realities or games	Asynchronous	Instructor	Slower to adapt	New, Change, More
Wikis	Open-sourced content from learners	Asynchronous	Learner	Rapid to adapt	More, Apply

# BEST PRACTICES

Learning professionals can be strategic contributors to law firms positioning themselves for 2020's "new normal." Once the Office 2010 deployments are past us, we predict many firms will begin to focus on ways to ensure the firms are leveraging existing technology to create optimal organizational performance. That begins with creating agile and adaptive performance support mechanics. It also means creating internal performance consultants, or business analysts, who study and observe the various practice groups and work teams to gain understanding of their needs. Once the needs are identified, these consultants can prescribe new or existing technologies, workflows and skills development for teams and individuals. Trainers who have been in the traditional "sage on the stage" role can become more ingrained in the business of the firm and make it their number-one priority to tie all learning to the business needs of the learners. This will be an incredibly valuable role in the firm of 2020.

## GETTING STARTED

There is a lot of work to be done to reinvent the learning programs in law firms. Here are some ideas for getting started:

- Brainstorm ways to push the learning resources to learners, when and where they need them
- Work with professional development and human resources on the big picture of developing a learning culture
- Look at the new-hire moment and determine what parts could lend themselves to informal learning
- Get "social" with the firm's LMS and learning portals and find ways to allow peer-to-peer ratings and comments



Char LeMaire is Chief Learning Officer and principal of Traveling Coaches. A co-founder of the company, Char heads up the company's talented team of learning specialists, content developers, user experience consultants and futurists. Considered to be the "trainer's trainer," Char travels the country consulting law firms on developing learning programs designed to effectively communicate change and teach technology best practices to the legal user community. Char and her team are focused on developing solutions designed for "Next Generation Learning" in law firms. She can be reached at [clemaire@travelingcoaches.com](mailto:clemaire@travelingcoaches.com).

- Research ways to identify peer experts in the firm
- Start with just one or two new concepts and learning assets and explore how they might work
- Optimize learning content so that it is searchable and quickly discoverable "in the moment" of need
- Create a performance consulting proof-of-concept with one work team
- Link the training team into what the KM group is doing with SharePoint and other knowledge-base and sharing technologies

According to Hildebrandt Baker Robbins' 2011 Client Advisory, 81 percent of firms surveyed in 2010 expected to increase investments to make their practices more efficient. And 76 percent ranked the areas of innovation in talent acquisition, training and management as particularly important, while 64 percent ranked practice tools and technology to be of particular importance. Are the years leading up to 2020 really to be considered "The Learning Decade?" Learning2020 sees law firm management learning new models and new ways to compete for and service clients. It sees lawyers learning new concepts like Legal Project Management (LPM). It sees administrative staff learning new roles and skillsets. It sees technology teams learning emerging technologies for KM, LPM, collaboration, practice management and so on. It sees trainers learning about new modes of learning, like social, mobile and consultative. So, yes, learning will be a critical and strategic component of the successful law firm in the year 2020. **ILTA**



Brie Stampe serves as Director of Market Strategies at Traveling Coaches, where she leads the company's strategic marketing and research efforts. Pairing 11 years of legal technology experience with an expertise in user adoption and change management, Brie works to explore trends and collaboratively define the changing needs of legal technology learners, striving to create the movement toward "Next Generation Learning" in law firms. Brie has an MBA from Thunderbird with a concentration in global strategic marketing and business intelligence. She can be reached at [bstampe@travelingcoaches.com](mailto:bstampe@travelingcoaches.com).