

## About This Blog:

This blog is devoted to exploring issues that continue to challenge law firms and their clients and to sharing ideas and tips about how the profession can or is innovating to adapt to the changing world of the "New Normal".

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# InFocus

Insights on Legal Practice Strategies & Innovations



Posted by [Susan Saltonstall Duncan](#) on Wednesday, 07 November 2012 in [Legal innovation](#)

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## 8 Tips for Innovative Client Service

*This is the second in a series of four related articles that appeared in the ABA Law Practice Magazine – Volume 38 Number 6 – November/December 2012. It is reprinted with permission.*

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In preparing for the articles I wrote on [Client Service and Value Innovations](#), I interviewed a number of thought-leaders who generously shared some insights for firms looking to adapt and innovate.

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**1. Realize that converting to the new model requires a total change in infrastructure:** hiring, training, performance review, advancement, compensation. Firms will often need to take whole practice groups off-line, one at a time, to accomplish this.

**2. Don't stay stuck in what is working well at the moment.** "Creative destruction" (à la Apple and other highly successful companies) is as important a concept for law firms as it is for industry. You must invent the next iteration of your own products, which often means you need to cannibalize what currently is successful or risk failure.

**3. Whether functioning as inside or outside counsel, you've got to aim for at least one of these three targets:** reduce legal cost (in-house and outside combined) by 25 percent, provide near certainty in cost, and/or significantly and measurably improve outcomes. If you're not achieving at least one of these targets, just what is it you are trying to accomplish?

**–Mike Roster, former chair of ACC, former GC and former Am Law 20 partner**

**4. Firms that succeed will introduce innovation into a traditional model.** They need to look outside the legal profession for models that are easily transferable. For example, we hired two professors from the Harvard Business School to build a program on how to lead and build teams.

**5. Creativity and innovation require that you make some mistakes and take some risks.** If you fail, learn from it and move along.

**6. Firms must innovate for tomorrow, not today.** We need to be looking at where the legal profession will be 50 years from now. We cannot innovate for current partners.

legalleadersblog.com  
patrickjamb.com  
thoughtfullaw.com

—**Bill Lee, former managing partner, WilmerHale**

**7. The next trend in pricing is segmentation by expertise or service.** Firms need to get more creative about how they price, and take into account that clients do not consider all expertise of equal value and don't want to pay the same rates just because partners have the same years of experience. The current pricing cannot support several current practice groups, unless the partners are brain surgeons.

—**Tom Sager, senior VP and general counsel, DuPont Legal**

**8. To avoid obstacles to innovation, law firms should follow these steps:**

- Establish a common definition/understanding of what innovation means for their firms as well as for their clients.
- Develop a systematic approach and framework for innovation.
- Look forward, not backward. Stop looking at the past for proof and precedents and look to the future for new ideas and solutions. Similarly, stop following and start leading.
- Identify and deal with the barriers.
- Overcome resistance to risk and change, and the focus on short-term profits. Hire, advance and reward creativity and innovators.

—**John Martin, chairman of Chadwick Martin and Bailey, and partner at South Street Strategy Group**

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