

The Future of the Legal Profession: A New Generation

More Leisure and Less Hours at the Office:

Law students want to revolutionize the way law firms are run. In their proposed solutions, they ask for conciliation between their professional and home lives, the promotion of happiness in the workplace, and more manageable work hours.

The junior lawyers of tomorrow do not have economic ambitions or career opportunities at the top of their list of priorities. Law students ask for a revolution among firms, purely based on social changes that affect them personally, with petitions for conciliation between their professional and home lives, a more efficient distribution of work hours, and a good work environment.

These proposals were collected by EXPANSIÓN from 10 law students from different universities from all around the world, and vary widely from the commonplace problems of the legal market. Some, actually, are quite unique, like the idea of placing areas where employees can rest and recuperate in firms, thus reducing the amount of daily stress, or asking young lawyers within the office to develop an app to solve a specific problem.

One thing that these students have in common is that they are all participants in the program LawWithoutWalls, organized by the University of Miami. This program brings together, every year, students to debate over the future of legal practice. This year they celebrated their first session at IE University, with an emphasis on the importance of changing legal practice and promote multidisciplinary collaboration.

A Horizontal Approach:

According to their assessment, it is essential to eliminate the vertical hierarchy in law firms and take a step towards a horizontal approach, encouraging a space where both junior and senior lawyers can express their opinions freely and propose solutions to current problems the firm is facing. Basically, it boils down to veteran lawyers trusting the knowledge that junior lawyers have.

Regarding multidisciplinary collaboration, the students state that this is the only way that law firms can better the services given to their clients.

1. What major change would you make in a firm to ensure it is up to speed with the demands of the 21st century?
2. If you have to choose among several firms in which to start to work, what would make you decide on one or another? What would be the key deciding factor? (Once again, please provide a full answer) 5-10 lines.

University of St. Gallen: Aina Cordero Rothen. "Space to present ideas and innovations."

1. I think that this generation can understand the evolution of technology at a faster speed than veteran lawyers. Due to this reality, I feel that it is essential for firms to implement spaces or training programs where "new arrivals" to the firm can freely express their ideas about the progress and evolution of specific programs that can help clients. This should not be a constant exercise, it should be annual with active participation from both junior and senior lawyers, where they can discuss, test, and come to potential agreements that should be part of an innovation portfolio for the firm.

2. The human factor is the aspect that I would most take into account at the time to pick which firm I wanted to work at. What I have most learned from all of my past work experiences is that someone who is involved and on a team with people that inspire and push them to be better, is willing to work a lot harder. A good relationship between work mates is essential; it generates enthusiasm and a desire to improve collectively.

University College London: Ben Ramsdale. "Ways to reduce stress."

1. Stress is common in competitive professions, such as law, and a saturated mind has been proven to be less productive. Firms should invest time in solving this problem, that way their lawyers will be happy, more efficient, and achieve better results. This is why I would like for firms to think of ways to reduce stress for their lawyers. Some ideas could be rest areas for lawyers, or places to practice meditation and yoga in the office.
2. I believe that employees should be happy. A happy employee is a good employee. I know that it is important to opt for a firm that has a good reputation, and has an innovative perspective on how to face new challenges, but I would always opt for a welcoming work environment. Law firms should take into account that an employee wants to face different types of challenges every day, and also give lawyers a space to learn and progress. I am convinced that a lawyer will always be committed to his work if he can feel proud of what he does, especially if he counts on the respect and admiration of his peers.

Stanford Law School: Zoe Friedland. "Always go for commitment with the community."

1. Law firms should be taking an important step towards making family and a home life more compatible with the work place. They should be able to guarantee a secure career path those who want to form a family, without hindering their ability to progress and be promoted within the firm. The fact that a woman feels the need to renounce her career for the sake of having a family should be eradicated. In fact, companies should actually promote their employees to have families, without this meaning that they have to sacrifice their careers.
2. If I had to choose between two firms that looked similar on paper, I will always pick the one that has a strong "pro bono" area. I think that all firms should give back and help the citizens that form part of their community. It is important to me that those in need have access to legal representation.

IE University: Santiago Menéndez. "Reduce complexity and maintain credibility."

1. Beyond the fundamental integration of technology in legal practice, I think it is imperative that the XXI century lawyer be capable of explaining to clients their work while reducing the complexity of said explanation. In order for this to work, I suggest drafting more graphic and simplified solutions that present the different courses of action that the client can take regarding an issue.
2. I think it is important to work in an environment that promotes creativity, and gives a space to lawyers with less experience to express their ideas and collaborate on a significant scale with their peers. My principal motivation during my first years of practice is to learn, and feel like I am a fundamental part of a team within the firm where I work. I would be inclined to firms that offer me career opportunities abroad, and that allows me to explore different areas of the law.

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University of Sao Paulo: Gustavo Sanservino. "We must generate a focus on collaboration."

1. A company must be able to create a dialogue between different areas of legal practice. In this sense, I think that the best strategy would be to implement a structure that allows all lawyers to participate, once a week, in a project that is headed by another department, different than their own. This would create a collaborative approach, and would allow different methods of conflict resolution to different problems that a firm could face. This structure that generates collaboration across different areas of law would then be an important tool that incentivises both cohesion and efficiency, as well as creativity.
2. I would like to give priority to a firm that is more business oriented, that creates technology and looks to give innovative solutions to problems, thus maintaining their lawyers motivated and prepared for any situation. This approach should also have the capacity to see to all of its clients needs, combining legal knowledge with a business oriented mentality. Lastly, the firm must make an effort to identify the strengths and goals of their lawyers, so that they can guide and position them in the best places for their own goals.

Griffith University: Shalm Harold. "We must use technology to solve problems."

1. Technology is useful to solve problems, and today's lawyers are not encouraged to be fully versed in all that technology has to offer. Lawyers often find themselves overwhelmed with work and inefficient operating systems. Before these situations, firms normally look to third parties to solve their problems. No one looks to see if a young lawyer could think of a solution to the problem, by developing a new web platform, a new software, or a new app. This is why I would suggest periodic meetings between all of the firm's departments to debate not only possible solutions to existing problems, but also foresee possible upcoming issues and identify them with enough time to already have a solution seen and discussed when it arises.
2. For me, a comfortable work environment is essential. It is for this reason that the deciding factor for whether I work at one firm or another is a good work environment and good personal relations between the lawyers. However, I do know that there is a tendency now among firms to make improvements in this sense.

University of Montreal: Chelsea Pellegrino. "Reorganize how work is done."

1. After having worked at several different firms, I realized that one of the most prominent problems at law firms pertains to management. Different departments function like mini firms, independent of each other, and they apply different solutions to identical problems. I think in the coming years firms should reorganize the way work is done, along with implementing management methods that resolve problems with more efficiency and clarity. Evidently, this is easier said than done, due to the fact that it means that firms need to rethink and reevaluate their business model, but I am convinced that this exercise needs to be done.
2. The real problem lies not in choosing a firm with a more international approach, or a large or a small firm, since they all have different aspects to their model that do not make them competitive with each other per se. The determining factor is to meet the people working there. It is essential to be welcome from the start, where "dumb questions" are not seen as a negative trait.

Peking University School of Transnational Law: Mengshi Li. "It is important to count on a multicultural work environment."

1. Globalization has generated a big change in the work that firms do. Today, it is more and more common that companies that engage in international transactions and firms need to be prepared to give solutions and responses from a legal perspective. It is because of this that I believe that firms should have several lawyers from different countries and cultures. Business is not conducted in the same way across the world, and firms should be able to have people that are able to relate to clients in a culturally competent manner.

2. In my case, the deciding factor to make a decision is the location of the firm. I would like to work at a north american firm, preferably in the United States, to better understand how business is conducted in this country. Hong Kong or Shanghai. Another factor I would take into account is the firm's work philosophy.

University of Witwatersrand: Amina Yuda. "Integration of all areas of practice."

1. In order to adapt to the rapidly changing market of the XXI century, firms must promote teamwork between lawyers. At this stage in the game, it is essential to count on firms that include all areas of practice into their problem solving approach. Firms must become more multidisciplinary as well. This is the only way they will be able to serve their clients better.
2. I personally have three elements that I will consider when choosing to work at one firm or another: On one hand, I would consider the business culture and work philosophy at the firm, due to the fact that if I am going to form part of said firm, I need to feel like I fit in. On the other hand, I would consider the potential opportunities I would have to grow within the firm, as well as the different positions I could aspire to have.

University of Miami School of Law: Sara Klock. "Lawyers with marketing tools."

1. To answer this question I think we need to look to law schools first. If we ask law schools to train students in technology-based classes like LawWithoutWalls, to train students to become fluent in programs such as Adobe Connect, we can create a trickle up effect from law schools, to young attorneys, to law firms. Making young attorneys fluent in technology creates a huge marketing tool or tools for prospective employers and employees. Thus, it is not only a good marketing tool for young attorneys, but also gives something to the firms they do not currently possess—an expert in the latest technology. At this level, firms can have younger attorneys conduct lunch and learns (or similar programs) to give an overview of the subject matter to the entire firm. This would create a transparency amongst a law firm about who is the expert in the specific technology. However, underlying this statement is the assumption that law firms hire new associates every few years. Thus, if you train law students in technology, then every few years you have new associates who are technologically literate.
2. As a twenty-three year old, job security and a place to grow individually and as an attorney are three huge factors. I do not want to take a job where I don't have a place to grow and become an integral part of a team. Moreover, I want to learn. I want to become an expert in my field. If a firm cannot offer me this, I would rather take a job that would pay less to experience the factors mentioned above.