

Cubs Win! Cubs Win!.....Will Clients be Next?

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By: The Chicago Office of LawVision Group

Holy Cow! After 108 years, the Curse of the Billygoat is dead, and the world has changed.

For Chicagoans, it's been a long time. No one alive today actually remembers personally the last time the Cubs were World Champions, and only a few very old timers have personal recollections of the last time the Cubs were even in the World Series. Most fans today grew up with a different understanding of what North Side baseball meant. The Cubs were *cute*, and lovable. Not fierce and unbeatable. People went to Wrigley Field for a nice afternoon in the sunshine. You knew what the product on the field was (uninspiring) but it formed a nice backdrop for a nice day in a nice environment. The institutional owners had a great thing going and had little incentive to change a thing. But then something happened...

Seven years ago, new owners took over the Cubs – and they came from a different background. Rather than being long-time institutional corporate owners, they were actually an entrepreneurial family with a history of having built something people wanted to buy. They brought in new leadership for the team, and together laid the groundwork for change. Over a small number of years the Cubs became, first, *relevant*, and now *champions*. And baseball in Chicago will never be the same!

This seems remarkably analogous to what's happening in the legal industry. For centuries, literally, the practice of law has proceeded along relatively unchanged, albeit sped up a bit as early technology entries (PC's, e-mail, etc.) came along. Lawyers and law firms served up an OK service package. Clients bought it and rarely complained. There was little reason to change anything though, as with Cubs fans for many decades, there was clearly an underlying yearning for something better. In spite of that, the clients went along and took what was offered, and paid the ticket price to get it.

But not so long ago, about the same time the Ricketts family bought the Cubs, actually, that underlying yearning turned into a fierce demand for a different, better product. Law firms have been struggling to keep up with that demand, but have had difficulty achieving the real breakthroughs that would deliver a new kind of legal service. One Managing Partner told us last week that while we can make changes around the edges and improve, fundamental change is "too hard" within the structure of the current industry, and to deliver that would require new entities, and a different business model. Well, entrepreneurial actors are experimenting with that type of change in various parts of the legal world. How much longer will it be before, like the new Cubs baseball model, a new model for the delivery of legal services breaks through? When it does, what will it mean for those left with the old model?

There is another lesson to be learned here, though. The Ricketts didn't start a new team on the North Side. They transformed a sleepy old one to deliver an entirely new product and baseball experience. If the Cubs could go from nowhere to World Champions in under a decade, your law firm can too!

Go Cubs! And thanks to the Cubs and the Indians for terrific seasons and a Fantastic World Series!

Joe Altonji, Truda Chow, and Geoff Schuler are resident in LawVision Group's Chicago office, and happy Cubs Fans