

Herding Cats: Focus on the End Game

By [Carla Landry](#) on December 16, 2020

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Law firms no longer have a choice. They used to. When markets were stable, and profits were rising across the industry, it was challenging to make a compelling case for change. Never mind that many that did are in enviable positions right now. In the current destabilized economy, the need for process reform is more urgent than ever. Yet, even amid the pandemic, there is and will continue to be significant resistance among lawyers to changing from what some corporate minds refer to as the cost-plus business model.

Firms are no longer able just to cut expenses on their way to profitability if they ever could. So, something has to give. The answer lies in improving processes. We have been counting down from three for many years, but we **really** mean it this time. The case is clear. Now the only question is: How do we herd the cats in the same direction?

[As discussed in my previous article](#), processes simplify life. Hand washing was not about the NICU process; it was about my son. Not everyone can be giddy about processes. Even as a process guru, I understand that there are quite a few things more exciting than Legal Process Improvement (LPI). But now is the time to stifle that yawn and tackle those processes anyway. LPI is about delivering value to clients. In the end, value drives profit.

In the past, I have talked about resistance to LPI either because, in addition to being overwhelmed by the thought of all those processes, lawyers can be a troublesome lot when it comes to change.

That brings us to herding cats. Lawyers have some unique personality traits in common, as revealed by Dr. Larry Richard, in his research using the Caliper Profile. Lawyers are not like everyone else. Surprise! To get each one of these highly analytical and independent thinkers going in the same direction, you will need to **start** by laying the foundation behind the scenes. You will need to create buy-in.

There are many ways to approach this challenge, but you will have the best chance for success if you build an alliance. Once you have support from a few, it will be easier to garner support from the masses. Laying the foundation is a three-step process (there is that word again), which like most other three-step processes, requires a fair amount of planning:

1. Start by finding the lawyers who wield the most influence. This process does not merely mean equity partners. It also does not mean just the rainmakers. You will likely find that the influencers are both rainmakers as well as other lawyers who lead, both formally and informally. Do not shun the latter group of informal leaders. And do not select your influencers based solely on their ability to bring in business. Any of your firm leaders can be equally effective in proselytizing for the cause.
2. Hold private discussions with each influencer to explain the overall vision and goals. Start with the need to solve a specific problem framed in terms that the influencer understands. *Is it profit? Is it time? Is it disliking being told what to do?* You are seeking buy-in to new ways of getting work done. These meetings are not a discussion about process. Stay out of the weeds for now.
3. Confirm that you have buy-in. You cannot assume that because you thoroughly explained your position and you are getting affirmative, "I hear you" signals that you have an agreement. Buy-in is more than a head nod. If the

response is less than enthusiastic, you have not closed the deal. Address the issues that prevent buy-in. Unless you have wholehearted agreement among the influencers, you are unlikely to get the group to go along. Rethink how you have presented the case for change. And read the next installment.

Once you have a few good champions who have influence within the group, you are ready to spread the word. Understanding lawyer personalities can help you determine how to craft your messages. One size will not fit all. But we can leverage what we know about the personality similarities among lawyers to increase the odds of getting all cats moving in the same direction.

In part three of this series, we will talk about lawyer personalities. These common traits can help you tailor your strategies to be most effective while you groom the influencers who can make change happen.