

Legal Project Management: You (Still) Can't Fake It Anymore – Part 3

By [Susan Raridon Lambreth](#) on February 7, 2019

Those of you who have been keeping your heads down for the last five to ten years hoping that the latest “fad” would go away should pay attention. As evidenced by the record number of attendees (well over half of which were in-house counsel) at this week’s [PLI’s Project Management for Lawyers*](#), legal project management (LPM) is not only more important than ever, it’s becoming table stakes. It doesn’t matter the size of your firm or legal department, LPM techniques not only help create effective, efficient delivery of legal services, they enhance the overall client relationship and experience.

It’s evident that clients will continue to demand LPM experience from their outside counsel, as well as expect a high level of sophistication regarding how law firms manage their matter. Over the last few years, I have had the privilege to speak with many leaders in the LPM arena, including those involved with CLOC’s LPM initiative. Several interviews with the legal operations leaders at Barclays stand out. [The interview](#) of Stephanie Hamon (at the time of the interview, Managing Director, Head of External Engagement, Legal), Chris Grant (Director, Head of Relationship Management, Legal) and Helga Butcher (Vice President, Legal Project Portfolio Lead) (hyperlink) made it clear that organizations can definitely tell if law firms are “faking it.” When I asked them how they can tell if law firms are truly implementing LPM or are faking it, they responded:

Some of the ways we can tell are the use of generic marketing materials or language in pitches. That is contrasted with firms that bring an experienced LPM person to the pitch. Through [our LPM] Consortium, we now know who really has a LPM team and who doesn’t. Some firms will say they have LPM professionals and even give names but then, we don’t see any of them involved in the management of our matters. The legal project manager, if really involved, understands the resourcing of the matter, the workstreams and the commercials (i.e., the business metrics) – and the firm is reducing write-offs and becoming more profitable. They are the intersection between the relationship team and effective and efficient service delivery.

If they truly have someone and value LPM, they will have the legal project manager involved in the commercial and efficient management of workstreams. The legal project manager is an integral member of the matter team, seen by the lawyers as a peer and is visible in meetings – as contrasted with the “mute” person in a meeting that the lawyers treat in a mere administrative role. For larger programs of work, the legal project manager is like a “chief of staff” for the lead partner. We want to see the legal project managers treated as high level professionals rather than simply administrative assistants.

Another indicator of this change was reflected in the research from [AdvanceLaw](#) studying thousands of matters which was presented by [Aaron Kotok](#) at this week's annual PLI program. Their data shows that the selection and recommendation of law firms is increasingly based more on a "solutions focus" than legal expertise.

LPM is one of the ways firms provide a "solutions focus" to clients. During the Client-Law Firm Collaboration panel at the PLI program my co-chair Rebecca Benavides of Microsoft and fellow panelists – Janelle Belling of Perkins Coie, Jaimee Farrer of GSK and Megan Panchella of Reed Smith and Shea Twomey-Meuse of WilmerHale (on behalf of her firm and Medtronic) – presented powerful examples of how they had used LPM, process improvement, technology innovations and more to enhance the services provided to these companies by their primary outside counsel and to build collaborative solutions to the companies' problems. The strong bonds between these law firms and their clients was evident from how they built these solutions together.

What are you doing to enhance the experience your clients have? Do you have [certified legal project managers](#)? Do they have a seat at the table?

** Available On-Demand on Feb. 14th*