

## LPM: Bringing it Home After All These Years

By [Carla Landry](#) on September 16, 2021

In the words of the late, great baseball Yankees Hall of Famer, Yogi Berra, "It's like deja vu all over again." That's how it seems at times with legal project management (LPM). I've been writing about LPM and legal process improvement (LPI) for nearly a decade and thinking about these issues even longer. Some readers may even recall some of those earlier posts.

### Who's on First: Early LPM

First there was the [article](#) debating whether LPI should come before LPM. That one resulted from hearing that many law firm leaders felt too overwhelmed to even know where to begin. It's not simply a matter of improving processes and bolting on a matter management technology tool. LPM can help partners understand how to maintain profitability and deliver value via the project management discipline. Today, there's an added consideration that was not part of the conversation a decade ago: Will you choose to use (or perhaps even partner with) an ALSP?

I have also tackled (back then and again more recently) how lawyer personality traits can hinder implementing LPM and LPI. Maybe it was analysis paralysis induced by the [lawyer personality](#) trait (as defined in the Caliper profile) of overzealous abstract reasoning. Or is it the persistent skepticism of lawyers? Perhaps these skeptics doubt the good intentions of those who suggest that legal services could be delivered by actually applying management skills to the process, controlling costs, and putting unique lawyer talents to highest and best use.

Next came the article about legal work as a [commodity](#). As part of an LPI initiative, you take the repeatable and routine aspects of legal work and streamline, outsource or eliminate those parts entirely. This leaves the more valuable components, those that require the depth of experience firms routinely tout during pitches. In other words, what's left are the pieces requiring significant legal expertise for the firm to manage as a project. As I said back then, and it bears repeating today, clients are willing (and perhaps even reluctantly happy) to pay for that expertise and those unique legal skills.

My final 2013 sound-off was about creating a [culture of efficiency](#). This strategy involves enlisting the more sociable rainmakers (Caliper profiles again) to advocate for greater efficiency among their colleagues, while employing the more analytical service partners to put their efforts toward identifying opportunities to capture efficiencies and align more closely with client objectives.

### Bases Loaded: The LPI/LPM Power Play

LPI combined with LPM to manage the improved process has been the obvious solution for years. Yet, at times, the resistance was nearly palpable. Some days, I wondered if anyone was listening. I was struck by another Yogi-ism: "I never said most of the things I said."

But, then I noticed that slowly but surely law firms were beginning to do more. As the pressures on law firms continue to mount, the benefits of these methodologies are increasingly apparent. And so I have continued to champion the LPI and LPM cause over the years, writing about best practices and helping clients realize the benefits by streamlining legal work

processes and putting structure around their outsourced work (i.e., their ALSP relationship) in the context of the overall matter lifecycle. I'm gratified to see it catching on even in the smallest of firms.

Recently, my colleagues, Yvonne Nath and Mike Short, put [hypothetical](#) numbers to the benefits of sourcing one type of client work to an ALSP. They surmised that law firms could improve their profit margins by 30 percent or more. Could it be?

It is not just possible, but probable. Using the example of a standard H-1B visa petition and some reasonable assumptions, they hypothesize that the matter profit could increase by nearly \$800 with support of an ALSP. That's not even considering what I've been talking about for years. If you use LPM techniques to manage the matter lifecycle from start to finish, including the outsourced piece, you ensure those profits and even more.

Yes, clients want efficiency, but they also want you to get it right. LPM enables you to do this. Even when work is outsourced, LPM allows lawyers to control the overall workflow. That's an important point. Of course, you can share workflow control. But is this the best way to ensure client satisfaction and maintain your client relationship? LPM doesn't mean that you do all the work. It simply means that you are accountable for the outcomes. That means not abdicating the client relationship to an outsourced party. It's the value-added component and the deep legal expertise that clients are willing to pay for.

And there are efficiencies to be captured through LPI and LPM whether or not you choose to go ALSP. Apply this across several practice groups and these methodologies start to feel more like imperatives than a nice-to-haves.

### **Grand Slam?**

Clients are certainly making enough noise about their preferences. An increasing number are requesting LPM specifically and efficiency more generally in their RFPs. They are demanding improved accountability, transparency and communication from their law firms. This can only come through the management methodology that is LPM. And law firms that fail to deliver risk the erosion of their market share.

However, some firms are still observing, reluctant to execute robust LPM strategies and LPI initiatives. Which brings me to another Yogi-ism: "You can observe a lot by watching." You can get even further, though, by getting in the game. Many firms have been quietly looking on from the sidelines. My question to those firms is:

What are you waiting for?

We believe there is a day coming soon when the majority of law firms are all in, reaping the true benefits of LPM and LPI to support their unique value proposition. At that point we'll be able to add the final Yogi-ism: "No one goes there anymore. It's too crowded."