

The Business of Law: How Innovative Law Firms – Use Talent Strategy to Achieve Strategic Goals

By [LawVision](#) on December 11, 2012

I recently attended a Kellogg School of Management Alumni event entitled “The Age at Which People Achieve Great Things” where [Ben Jones](#), Associate Professor of Management & Strategy, presented influential new research on age and professional breakthroughs. Surprisingly, according to his research innovation is increasingly less common at young ages.

Professor Jones divided skills for innovation into two critical pieces (typically, neither piece alone is sufficient for business success):

- **Technical Knowledge:** Scientific & engineering knowledge – creative & technical insights/skills
- **Market Knowledge:** Marketplace & organizational knowledge – consumer & management insight/skills

What about innovation in the legal profession? A traditional measuring stick for “achieving great things” in the legal profession was making partner. However, as evidenced by the third annual Financial Times US Innovative Lawyers 2012 special report, innovation is now also an integral element in “achieving great things” in the legal industry as well. It is clear that innovation is creating synergies between individual lawyer achievement and overall firm success.

For many of the firms recognized in the FT report for outstanding innovation in the business of law, technical knowledge appears synonymous with “talent strategy” – one of the four key elements in The LawVision Group’s perspective on the new business model for law. Rather than narrowly defining technical knowledge as substantive legal knowledge, these firms are proactively developing new ways to invest in their talent.

Although you can review the full report [here](#), I’ve highlighted several of the initiatives below in accordance with Professor Jones’ technical/market distinction:

Outstanding Innovation in the Business of Law: Technical Knowledge

White & Case – An associate development curriculum with competency models for business skills, delivered online across the firm’s offices globally

Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton – Invested 2 million dollars to provide first-year lawyers with a business training program that equates to a two-week MBA

Davis Polk & Wardwell – A comprehensive career development program for summer interns & associates that improved productivity and client satisfaction levels

Latham & Watkins – A centralized strategy that enhanced the working environment for attorneys and streamlined the firm’s real estate portfolio

Crowell & Moring – Used an original approach to project management to change behavior first, and then introduced new technologies and training

Paul Hastings – A talent management program that focused associates on career goals and skills that are valued by clients by analyzing role model behaviors; also reinvented its secondment program to include partner-level secondees, resulting in better relationships and broader assignments

Outstanding Innovation in the Business of Law: Market Knowledge

Bracewell & Giuliani – The *Policy Resolution Group* combines legal, government relations and communications advice with flexible billing arrangements

DLA Piper – *Venture Pipeline* initiative provides a free, value-added service to companies in need of funding if they sign up as clients

Morrison & Foerster – The *FrankNDodd Resource*, free of charge to clients, is a regulatory tool that is based upon a comprehensive & interactive database

Simpson Thacher & Bartlett – The firm's *Public Company Advisory Practice* focuses on issues such as executive compensation, succession and corporate governance

Seyfarth Shaw – The *SeyfarthLean* consulting business helps in-house legal teams become more efficient through a holistic approach to workflow management and resourcing

Holland & Knight – A system that replaces the billable hour in fixed-fee matters as the unit by which to measure the value of the fee by allocating percentages of the fee to tasks

These firms are ahead of the curve in their technical and market knowledge. However, innovation is no longer a luxury for any law firm seeking to achieve great strategic, client-focused goals...it's now a necessity.