

What is Successful Legal Project Management?

By [Carla Landry](#) on November 15, 2012

A few years ago, a Managing Partner of a leading AmLaw firm told me that any smart lawyer with a list can be a good project manager. I smiled and nodded and decided I needed to remember that. At the time, I was returning from running our first public program in legal project management training with my colleague, Susan Lambreth, a leading expert in Legal Project Management. This very successful partner certainly gave me food for thought. Now, nearly three years later, several public programs and many in-house training programs later, I still remember his words....

Our experience has shown us that firms rolling out a legal project management initiative have done so most successfully if they have made it a firmwide initiative. That means:

- Include a change management initiative – i.e., change partner and associate compensation systems
- Invest in technology and tools
- Invest in training and do this in a meaningful way – i.e., train everyone not only in legal project management techniques, but in how to use the firm tools/technology to implement those techniques
 - This means the tools should be developed or purchased in advance of the training
 - Develop templates – this can be done before, during or after the training process

Keep the entire process transparent to firm members (lawyers and non-lawyers) AND clients, where appropriate. Although the inclination might be to start small, and it's fine to roll out legal project management in steps and phases (e.g., by practice, by client, etc.), the "culture" piece of it should be broad. It's important to understand that a firmwide effort of this kind takes time (i.e., years!) to roll out fully – this is not something that is going to be accomplished by the end of the year, or maybe not even by the end of next year. A lot of foundational pieces can be in place in a shorter period (approach, technology, some templates, etc.), but expect the firmwide effort to be ongoing for some time.

So why do I remember that successful partner's words? The point is to get started somewhere and have the patience to follow through...and maybe "somewhere" is with a smart lawyer and a list.