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Perspectives: From the Chair of the ABA Law Practice Management Section, March/April 2013

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Perspectives

From the Chair of the ABA Law Practice Management Section

Technology—friend or foe? In this, our annual ABA TECHSHOW issue, we have several articles that discuss technology, describe its utility and extol its virtues. Legal practice is continually evolving, with an increasing integration of technology in firm operations and in the daily activity of lawyers and staff. Technology has affected firm operations and has changed how law firms market, how lawyers interact with clients and even where firms locate. This impact has not always been positive. With all of its benefits, technology is not the lawyer's panacea. It can negatively affect employee productivity. It can be a disruptor to smooth and efficient firm operations. How then can you ensure that the technology you use and bring into firm operations enhances, rather than hinders, your efforts? How do you ensure that technology is an integral component of an efficient and effective legal practice?

It starts with education, to identify problems and determine whether technology should be the solution. Start by educating yourself about firm operations. As lawyers, we often leave office operations to staff and are therefore not as up to speed as we would like regarding the challenges office personnel may be confronting regularly. For example, we want to see monthly revenue and expense numbers for planning purposes. How accurate are the numbers? Are the revenue and expense numbers positioned in their proper months so that we can see patterns, cyclic variations and irregularities? In answering these questions, are we talking to the billing person to see if he or she has the information needed to get bills out on a timely basis each month? If he or she is challenged to get the bills out, is it a technology issue or a human behavior issue? If the latter, can technology nevertheless address it? For instance, are lawyers logging their time faithfully and consistently concurrent with their activity? Do the time reports have sufficient information detailing how this time was incurred on behalf of clients? Are the lawyers reporting their detailed time logs in

time for the next billing cycle? Is the billing person empowered to obtain this information from less-than-compliant lawyers? If the answer is "no" to these latter questions, technology may be a solution in facilitating compliance and maintaining office peace.

The point is that problems may exist even if people don't complain. Make a point to get out and talk to staff and see how well they are supported in their jobs. With this education, you will be better able to address the needs of your firm in a manner that takes into account the cost/benefit analysis of introducing technology into operations. Include in your purchasing calculus all personnel who will be using the technology, updating it and monitoring the information flow. Their job will be to maintain a point of view at a granular level, informing you if and when changes need to be made. It will be your job to be attain a level of technological competence to be able to have meaningful dialogues with the various firm constituents.

To assist your education, you are invited to attend the 2013 ABA TECHSHOW, held April 4–6 at the Hilton Chicago. There will be educational tracks covering areas of firm operations to help your decision-making process for the success of your firm. Ethical considerations with respect to the implementation and use of technology will be presented as well. Vendors will be present to answer your questions and demonstrate how their products and services can be the solution to your operational needs. Just as important are the lawyers you will have the opportunity to meet at this Conference and EXPO. Like you, they are in practice and are looking to see how technology can help them move their firms forward. Come with questions, and leave with answers and friendship. This Law Practice Management (LPM) signature event is a yearly crowd-pleaser.



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