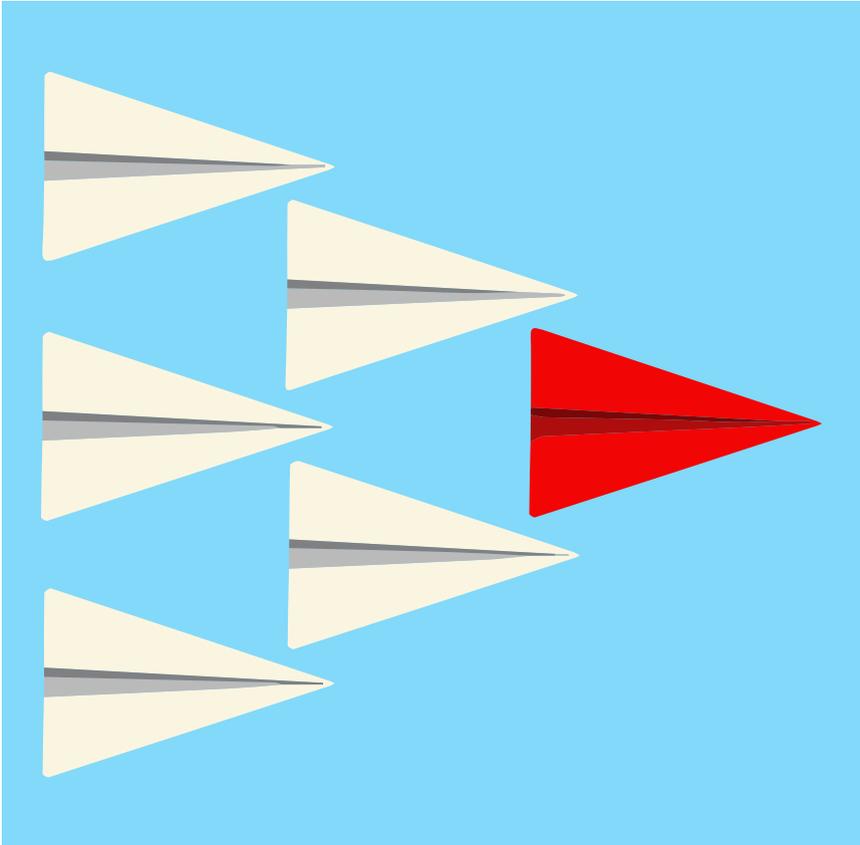


# Moving into Management: What You Need To Get from Here to There

by Jared Coseglia



A frequent question from mid-career legal technology professionals is, “How can I become a departmental manager at a law firm?” Between 2000 and 2006, dozens of these positions were created and filled each year within the Am Law 200 in e-discovery, knowledge management and litigation and practice support.

Today, most law firms have established leadership in place, leaving less than two percent of open positions per year categorized as manager- or director-level. Law firms typically want experienced managers, but getting trained and promoted from within into a leadership role could require more time and good fortune than many legal technology professionals have.

The next generation of legal technologists must be progressive to contribute to the growth of their professional community, but current leaders in law

firm support staff express a return-to-fundamentals philosophy for identifying the strengths needed for promotion. As legal tech pros balance the forward vision and the tried-and-true, here are attributes to cultivate that can lead to managerial opportunities. These same qualities can help veteran managers identify who on their staff might be ready for leadership.

## Be a Mentor

Many rising professionals complain that they lack opportunity to gain managerial responsibilities in their current role, but one of the greatest opportunities to demonstrate leadership is to teach others what you know. James Bekier, Director of Litigation Services at BakerHostetler, attests that in his department, “[W]e provide more growth and managerial opportunities for those who have imparted their knowledge to others and thus have the freedom and time for new challenges.”

The transfer of knowledge does not come easily to all professionals; the most knowledgeable technical subject-matter expert or the most responsive client service professional might struggle to teach others how to do what they do. Professionals such as these yearn for a progression into leadership roles but do not understand why their accolades, high customer satisfaction reviews and demonstrated intelligence have not positioned them for management. “A key to becoming a manager is to become a mentor,” says Bekier, who grew into his current director role from the senior project management position for which he was first hired. If you cannot teach others, you cannot delegate; if you cannot delegate, you cannot manage.

## Hear Others’ Voices

Adam Lew, Manager of E-Discovery and Litigation Technology at Friedman Kaplan Seiler & Adelman LLP, says one of the keys to success as a manager is to “always keep an open mind and accept input from others.” This “best-idea-in-the-room” mentality serves legal technology professionals well, especially as subordinates outgrow them on certain nuances of technical processes and day-to-day client management. Accepting ideas from others and executing on them has positive side effects:

- » It shows employees their ideas have value and that they can contribute to the greater performance of the team
- » It instills confidence that the ideas of all employees, not just managers, are heard
- » It teaches the manager humility as a leader
- » It builds a sense of trust among peers

Allowing others to have a voice in decisions that affect the entire team or department is a critical part of leadership. Lew makes the point that “all [his] employees are actively engaged in conversations related to department initiatives and tasks.”

### **Gain Trench Experience**

For Michael Quartararo, Director of Litigation Support Services at Stroock & Stroock & Lavan LLP, a successful legal technology manager has “been in the trenches”: a manager needs to have done the things staff is being asked to do. This experience gives instant credibility, which can be useful when a manager is hired to enter situations of operational triage or morale repair. Rolling up your sleeves and running productions, troubleshooting a database that will not load and having empathy for staff are all part of trench experience, but Quartararo explains that it is also about “making difficult decisions and solving real-world problems on projects.” Being under pressure and learning from mistakes help you develop emotional intelligence about people and projects.

It is worth noting that in legal technology, 65 percent of jobs in demand are for new hires who will be “in the trenches.”

### **Demonstrate Loyalty**

Great leaders both give and receive loyalty. Attracting and retaining talent is a key measure of success for any manager. Law firm employers calculate tenure at other jobs when hiring a manager, especially if they are considering someone stepping into a managerial role for the first time. Hiring an unproven manager is an investment, and prior years of loyalty to an employer

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can be vital in selling yourself as a viable managerial investment.

John Hogan, Senior Manager of Litigation Support Services, has led teams at law firms for over a decade, and he places loyalty at the cornerstone of both his success and the success of those he manages. Hogan says that the true value of loyalty is in the environment it creates: “A team knowing that their leader will support them no matter what creates an environment of confidence — and confidence is key in the legal field.”

### **Insight on When To Leave**

Legal technology professionals who have spent their entire working lives at law firms and want to move into management roles might need to leave law firm life and work at a vendor to get the experience they crave. Jobs are moving to service providers, where there will be a need for more layers of talent and more management, specifically of human resources.

This is a shift from five or more years ago when law firms dominated the job market opportunities. Corporations have become much more involved in dictating how their outside counsel provides support services, frequently engaging consultants and providers before their lawyers. As the paradigm continues to shift and corporate clients dictate to law firms what vendors they will use, how and where their data will be hosted, and with whom they will collaborate in a client service capacity, opportunities for employment will be most bountiful on the service provider side of the industry. The fastest track to management might be making an exit from law firm life, returning to it later — or perhaps not. P2P



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