

It's no secret that 2009 has been a nightmare for lawyers. The disintegration of "big law" as the mainstay of our profession, lay-offs by law firms of every size, deferred hiring practices, salary reductions, the rise of sole practitioners and alternative fee structures have become routine as cash-strapped clients seek other means of resolving issues and demand legal fee reductions. Just as our lifestyles may never return to their pre-economic meltdown status, so the practice of law as we know it will never return, as changes made in the midst of necessity will remain as industry-practice standards.

That is not necessarily a bad thing. But change is difficult and never welcome. For lawyers, it also requires the need to forge new paths to a redefined meaning of a successful career. In a recent, albeit completely unscientific, survey asking lawyers about their experiences with what I knew to be current law practice challenges, I received 62 anonymous responses. Their responses are consistent with generally accepted beliefs of the effects of industry changes. They also reflect the absolute need to look to the use of new tools and resources to recreate a successful law practice. Here are the results:

- 68.8% of the responders said they were forced to reduce their staff size as a result of the economic downturn
- As a result of the reductions, they've experienced the following negative consequences:
 - Working longer hours, doing the work of several jobs
 - Had to take on more administrative work
 - Reduced ability to "have a life" outside of law
 - Spending significant time on business development
 - Anxiety resulting from lack of work
- In the last 6 months, 62.5% of the responders had to work overtime more than 10 times to complete routine legal research and writing projects; 18.8% had to do so 7-10 times; 12.5% had to do so 1-3 times
- As a result of the need to work overtime, they've experienced the following negative consequences:
 - Unable to keep up with routine preventive medical, dental & exercise appointments
 - Health has been neglected
 - Bored by work
 - Tired, lost weight, trouble sleeping, starting smoking, barely eat
 - Occasional exhaustion
 - Anxiety
 - Stay home all weekend to sleep and rest, rather than going out
 - Structure life around work
 - Less leisure time

- In the last 6 months, 43.8% of responders had to reduce fees for legal research & writing time 1-3 times; 18.8% had to do so more than 10 times; 12.5% had to do so 4-6 times; 12.5% had to do so 7-10 times
- As a result of reducing their fees, they've lost between 10 – 45% of income during that time
- In the last 6 months, 81.3% of responders were asked by their clients to reduce their fees
- Regarding the use of law management software, 53.3% of responders use a combination of desktop and web-based applications; 26.7% use desktop only; 20% use no software at all; 13.3% use web-based only
- Regarding retaining the services of freelance or contract lawyers, 68.8% said they have considered doing so
- Following are the reasons why they have not done so:
 - Inability to vet material based on work needs, time sensitivity, research skills
 - Concerned about quality of work
 - Concerned about confidentiality, privacy and client retention
 - Too controlling

Just as our society must find ways of coping with our new economic realities, so too lawyers must look forward and embrace new ways of doing business in order to adapt. Simply cutting costs or making superficial adjustments will not sustain us, and those who do not grab hold of alternatives will not survive the crisis. The ABA Journal's [Legal Rebels](#) project is one significant sign that remaking the legal profession is not just a passing fad.

What are those alternatives? Innovative use of technology and manpower is emerging as the primary path to future success. The use of [virtual law management systems](#), open source research sites, [freelance and contract attorneys](#) and virtual assistants offer opportunities to maintain and grow your practice while cutting costs and maintaining your health. Visit the ABA's [Economic Recovery Resources](#) to gain more information on making your way through the revolution.

The past is gone. The future is now. Be here.

Lawyers: do you have time and resource management dilemmas that require creative solutions? Freelance attorneys and advanced technology are here to help. Take advantage of new and exciting ways to have both a successful law practice and a great lifestyle! Click [here](#) to contact me for a free consultation.