

# You Can't Make Lawyers into Techies: 3 Lessons About LPM

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As a result of a conversation I had this week with David Rueff, a partner at Baker Donelson and an ardent advocate of Legal Project Management (LPM), right now I am particularly mindful of the adage, “never try to teach a rhino to dance. The results are generally unsatisfactory and it annoys the rhino.” Mind you, I am not calling lawyers rhinos. However, I do want to emphasize the futility of trying to coerce lawyers into doing things they are not suited or inclined to do by using the phrase, “*but it will make your life better.*”

## **LPM Likes Technology**

The focus of my philosophizing is technology, specifically the development of software, templates and tools to support the scoping, planning, budgeting and managing of tasks that are instrumental to effective Legal Project Management. LPM is maturing rapidly, and its rush into adolescence is attended by legions of internal IT experts and outside consultants who want to provide lawyers with elegant technological “solutions” that will support their struggle toward more efficient, predictable and cost-effective management of legal work.

## **Chapter One: Give It To The IT Guys**

The initial efforts of IT gurus to develop software-driven templates and dashboards often produced tools of astonishing elegance – and complexity. At demos for firm partners, these wizards showed off all their tools’ technological bells, whistles, nuances and capabilities with effortless facility. The IT experts *loved* this stuff.

## **Ah...No**

But when lawyers tried to: a) learn these technologies; and b) apply them to their daily work while also *doing* their daily work, their heads exploded. Thus did firms learn that development of LPM software and tools could not simply be delegated entirely to the IT jockeys. The rhinos definitely were not dancing...and they certainly were annoyed, as reflected in their wholesale resistance to these new LPM support tools.

## **Okay, How About *This*?**

Major law firms’ determination to develop better, more user-friendly LPM tools (accompanied by the expenditure of significant resources) rapidly led to development of far more user-friendly software tools, including self-populating dashboards that could manage and integrate information

about project scope, phases and tasks, the makeup of the project team, budgets, progress milestone with firm time and billing systems. Many of these much-improved tools were developed with the input of lawyers like David Rueff: legally proficient, technologically savvy, and intensely committed to making LPM work. Among the best of these second-generation efforts, in my opinion, was Baker Donelson's *BakerManage*, an integrated tool that was logical, effective, down-to-earth and easy to understand and use. I thought it Best in Class in 2010-2011.

### **What? Me Training?**

BakerManage and other second generation efforts still presented a learning curve to lawyers that necessitated some training and some practice, but the obvious utility of these tools was bound to lead to wholesale adoption with shouts of joy and open arms, right?

Wrong. When offered the manifold benefits of cutting-edge LPM technology, lawyers have complained much, resisted mightily, and generally left the tools to gather dust. A telling example: several global firms have offered their lawyers iPads, on which the firm's proprietary LPM software is resident. They can't give 'em away...oh, wait! They are giving 'em away! Adoption rate? Less than 1%.

David Rueff tells me that his firm has gone back to the drawing board to further streamline BakerManage. It's not just that the new iteration is simpler, graphically more accessible and easier to navigate. It's logic – the way it depicts and handles information – has been fundamentally changed to “think the way lawyers think, and act the way lawyers act.”

### **3 Lessons to Make Technology Work**

Certainly, lawyers are not Luddites, determined to resist progress and deny any change. It's that they are *lawyers*, not IT types. So that's Lesson One: *You can't make lawyers talk IT; IT has to learn to talk lawyer*

Lesson Two is that lawyers insist on immediate gratification. They will happily sacrifice technological sophistication (with its attendant steep learning curve) for *instant* utility.

Lesson Three is the need for patience when introducing any sweeping change that seriously impacts traditional behaviors. Lawyers don't welcome transformative changes, but they will accept sequential phase shifts (if only because their competitors do). Dechert's Ben Barnett put it succinctly in an earlier [At The Intersection](#) post: “You should **not** try to build a perfect system off the bat. Don't bite off more than the firm – and its lawyers – can chew. Build something that works now, recognizing that you will probably be changing and redesigning almost everything as your LPM function matures.”

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