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Lawyers must focus on their new year's resolutions

Another new year is upon us. We recently got together with family and friends to pause and reflect on all that has transpired over the past 12 months, including our successes and accomplishments, as well as our shortcomings. It is a time to commit to making this next year better than ever, whether that means being more productive, effective and successful at work, spending more time helping those in need or focusing on our physical fitness. And it is a time to consider new endeavors (or to revisit old ones) and to prioritize and commit to those people and goals that are the most important to us.

As attorneys, many of us find ourselves reflecting on the past year of our careers and the changes that continue to ebb and flow throughout the legal profession, especially those precipitated by the most recent recession. There is no doubt that this particular economic downturn has been a game changer for the economy and business on a global basis. Just as our clients are feeling the impacts of this seismic change on a deeply fundamental level, so are we as their trusted advisers.

The business of law, as all other businesses, has been forced to change with the turbulent times, in a very Darwinian sort of way. There is no doubt that it will continue to evolve at a rapid pace. For those who have been waiting for the flux and uncertainty to abate, it has become increasingly clear that we are experiencing the new normal and the only steady state we can expect is one of continual change. This should be no surprise, as other industries have likewise been forced to recalibrate and reinvent themselves in a way that would have been unimaginable merely a few months ago in the struggle to stay relevant, be competitive and to survive. Although in many ways the professional services industry has historically been insulated from fluctuations in consumer demand and economic volatility, this is simply no longer the case. Thus, the legal profession is now forced to face the same types of concerns that other sectors have known and accepted for decades. It is incumbent upon us to decide not only whether we will come to terms with and accept this paradigm shift, but whether we will embrace it



Paradigm Shift

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and play an active role in shaping our collective future.

Annual resolutions typically stay on our minds and in our consciousness for the first few weeks, maybe a month or two, into the new year. However, as with promises to save up for a new car or to lose those few extra pounds, our professional goals for 2012 are going to require focus, persistence and diligence and will require a permanent behavioral shift on our part if we are going to successfully achieve them in the new normal. We are each invited to take a close look at where we have been and where we are and figure out what we need to do to get us where we want to go, both professionally and personally. In taking stock, we can reassess, recalibrate and formulate an action plan to maintain our focus in accomplishing our most important goals while following our passion and striving for inner balance.

The shifting paradigm invites us to take a look at the many different facets of our professional existence and to seek ways for us to better our performance and ourselves. Perhaps this is the year when you will strive to refine your client service skills and to become a more valuable member of your clients' legal teams. Or you may decide that 2012 will be your breakthrough year in monetizing

your business development efforts. Perhaps you will set your sights on getting promoted or working toward that next leadership role within your company and taking your legal skills and performance to the next level.

Maybe this year you will focus on becoming a better mentor to the younger attorneys in your organization. Or you may find ways to expand your skill set over the coming months to add to your areas of expertise. Perhaps doing more pro bono work is your priority for the year. Your goals may be more interpersonal in nature — for example, focusing on being a better listener, coming out of your shell and doing more networking, taking classes or enlisting the assistance of an executive coach to improve your professional and personal effectiveness. Whatever the case may be, we should prioritize and focus upon those goals which speak to us the most and be both aggressive and realistic about what we can reasonably accomplish. Being passionate about our careers and our professional and personal goals is contagious and it excites those around us as well. Passion not only begets passion; passion also begets success.

In the coming months, this column will focus on law's shifting paradigm and the business context that drives both the legal profession as well as professional services organizations as a whole. It will examine the many different facets of the practice affected by the fundamental changes of the past several years and which are guaranteed to continue for years to come. It will explore ways in which we can all survive, adapt and thrive, notwithstanding the metamorphosis of the profession and the uncertainty of the times.

Albert Einstein once said, "Nothing happens until something moves." This quote is such a profound commentary on a myriad of levels. Perhaps we should view Einstein's words as an invitation for us to think about how we currently view our careers and ourselves and to consider ways to change that thinking. Thoughts are very powerful and when we change the way we think about and approach something, we inevitably cause a similar shift in those around us. Together, we can profoundly change our profession and our world.