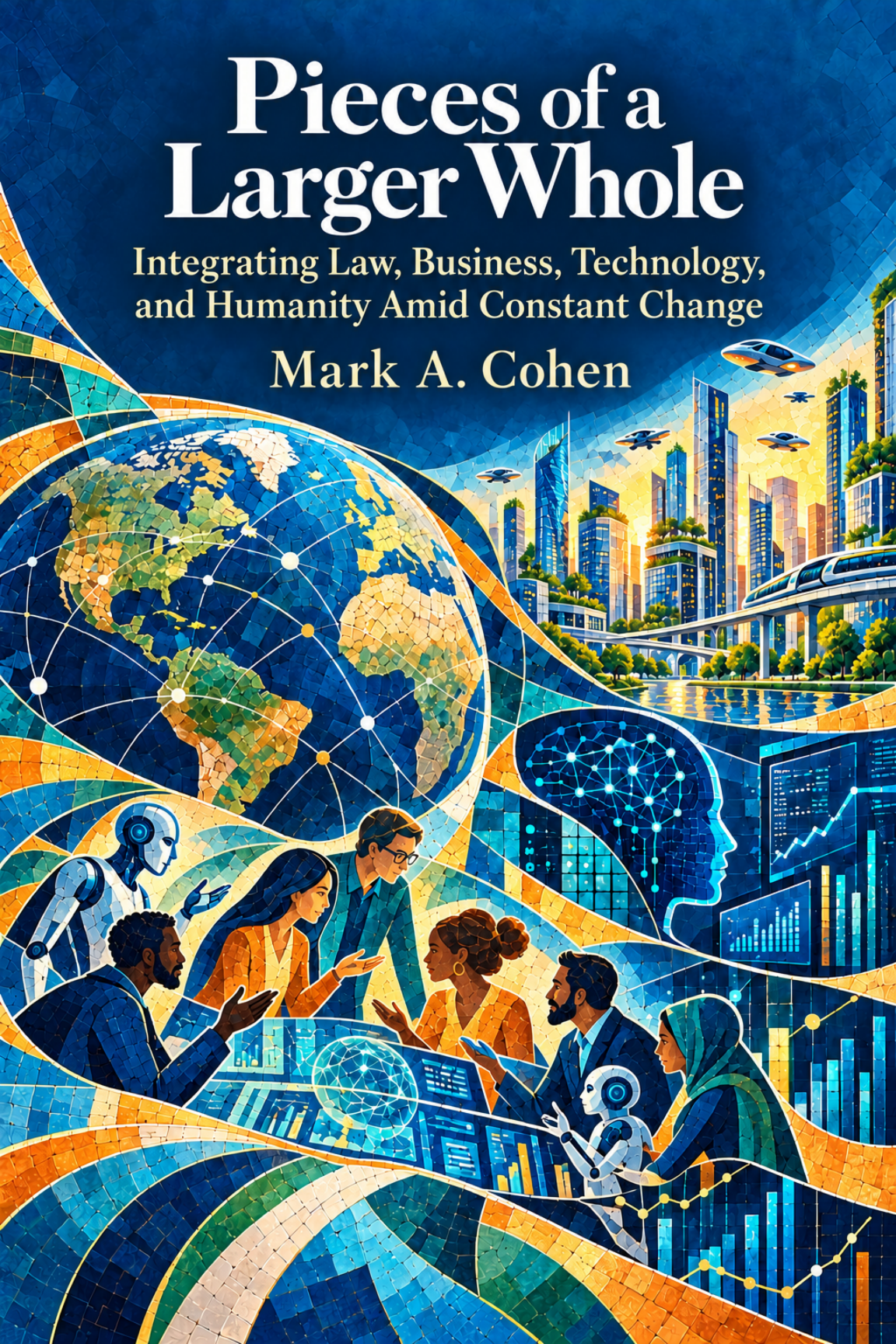
Pieces of a Larger Whole

Integrating Law, Business, Technology, and Humanity Amid Constant Change

Mark A. Cohen



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Foreword by Bill Deckelman

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Foreword

I first encountered Mark Cohen through his writing and public work on the changing legal industry. I subsequently invited him to address the senior leadership of DXC's global legal organization. What began as a conversation developed into a sustained advisory relationship as we undertook a multi-year digital and cultural transformation.

Mark brought a perspective that was both broad and practical. Technology was part of the discussion, but so were strategy, culture, talent, data, incentives, organizational design, and the needs of the business. He challenged us to consider how those elements worked together. The objective was not simply a more efficient legal department. It was a legal function capable of creating greater value for the enterprise.

That ability to connect the pieces is the thread running through this monograph. It reflects an unusual combination of experience: lawyer, entrepreneur, business leader, technology collaborator, educator, adviser, and community builder. Mark's ideas have been tested in organizations, in relationships with clients, and in the difficult work of making change happen. The lessons include setbacks as well as achievements.

We put a shared conviction into practice when we co-founded the Digital Legal Exchange. We brought multinational companies together with a faculty drawn from business, technology, economics, academia, and law. Our purpose was to help organizations approach transformation as an enterprise challenge. Mark's contribution extended beyond the ideas and programming. He brought complementary people and perspectives together and helped turn those connections into productive collaboration.

The Exchange's subsequent combination with the Liquid Legal Institute expressed the same principle: integration can create value that separate institutions cannot achieve as effectively alone.

Artificial intelligence makes this perspective more urgent. Its capabilities are advancing rapidly, but an organization's ability to benefit from them depends on choices about leadership, people, business models, and purpose. Acquiring technology is one decision. Changing how people work, exercise judgment, share knowledge, and serve customers requires something more.

Mark understands that distinction. He also understands the human qualities on which trusted advice depends: intellectual rigor, sound judgment, empathy, and integrity. I have valued those qualities in our work together.

Pieces of a Larger Whole is a personal reflection with relevance well beyond one career or profession. It invites readers to question inherited boundaries, draw on different kinds of experience, and consider how law can contribute more fully to business and society. For those responsible for leading change, it offers a valuable perspective on both the possibilities and the work required to realize them.

Beyond the work itself, Mark is a close friend. I have long admired the breadth of his life and career experiences, and the curiosity that he brings to every endeavor. A life as varied as Mark's is rare, and readers are fortunate that he has shared many of his experiences and life lessons in his own words, with such clarity, honesty and generosity. I am grateful to have been asked to write these words, and I greatly value his friendship.

Bill Deckelman

Opening

The Romans believed experience is the best teacher. Nearly fifty years into a professional career and seventy-four years of life, I am convinced they were right.

One of my earliest professional lessons involved a conflict I did not anticipate. I have always been drawn to critical thinking, curiosity, and creativity and regarded them as complementary. Law certainly prized the first. It honed critical thinking through issue identification, analysis, seeing both sides of a case, and advocacy. But as a young lawyer learning the craft, creativity and curiosity were not on the menu. I am a self-described "creatively pragmatic iconoclast" in a rules-based, pedigree-centric, and conservative profession. Too often, the response to "Why?" was "Because that's the way it's always been done." I questioned whether I had chosen the wrong profession.

At the time, I was living with an artist. I complained to her about law's doctrinal bent, rules, and rigidity. Think of law as a new language, she told me. Master its vocabulary. Speak it fluently. Understand its idioms. Learn to tell jokes in its language. Then bring your creativity, diverse interests, and personality to it. That is when you will enjoy it—and become good at it.

Her advice has stayed with me since, and her wisdom extended far beyond law. Mastery does not require conformity. A craft can provide discipline without defining the limits of one's imagination. There is, however, a sequence: learn the language, apply it in your voice, and be authentic.

It took experience to understand how right she was.

Experience is more than accumulated knowledge, passage of time, or a résumé. It is knowledge tested by life and consequence. Some experiences teach their lessons as they occur. Others remain disconnected pieces until something later provides context. Experience is not simply what happens to us; it is how we process it. Failure can deepen resilience or make risk intolerable. Expertise can give us confidence to enter unfamiliar territory or become a fortress against it. Experience can sharpen curiosity or enshrine precedent—this worked before, so why change it? Experience is the best teacher, but not everyone is a great student.

The range of our experience matters, too. Deep expertise is essential to mastery, but it can narrow the field of vision. Varied experience exposes us to different assumptions and ways of solving problems. It does not guarantee wisdom, but it can reveal connections that siloed specialization may obscure.

Career is one source of experience, a part of life's mosaic. That is why I have never found the term "work-life balance" especially useful. Family, friendships, health, loss, financial circumstances, and passions shape how we work, lead, take risk, manage stress, and find purpose. Career shapes us in return. Life and career are inextricably bound. It's not always clear how the pieces fit together.

Experience supplies the pieces of the mosaic, but not the instructions for assembling them. Curiosity widens the aperture and helps us see relationships that professional silos—and sometimes expertise itself—obscure. Connection is the beginning. Value is created when the pieces are aligned and integrated around a common purpose.

Artificial intelligence raises the stakes. Its extraordinary ability to retrieve, analyze, synthesize, and recognize patterns makes

judgment, empathy, integrity, curiosity, and humanity more consequential—not less.

My career began with learning the language of law. What followed was an effort to master the craft without becoming captive to its boundaries—and, eventually, to connect it with driving forces transforming business, society, and the global order.

Mastering the Craft—Then Widening the Aperture

I began my career as an Assistant United States Attorney. It was the best—though certainly not the most lucrative—practice job I ever had. The client was the United States of America. I saw firsthand the enormous power of Government and the corresponding responsibility of its counsel not to abuse it. Serving as lead counsel in 21 major federal trials, several appeals, and a historic class action that ultimately reached the Supreme Court provided an extraordinary foundation for a young lawyer.

The experience taught me much more than trial craft. Preparation, judgment, resilience, and accountability became part of my professional DNA. So did something more fundamental: professionalism is not simply about expertise or winning. It is about the responsibility that accompanies being entrusted with someone else's interests—and, in Government, with the exercise of public power. Earning the trust of your client is crucial, but so too is advancing public trust in lawyers, legal institutions, and the rule of law. Law is a profession, a business, and a steward of the rule of law and the common good.

I transitioned from Government to become the youngest partner at Finley Kumble, then one of the nation's largest corporate law firms. Practice excellence mattered, but business origination, profitability, and institutional politics were the organization's currency. The firm's Managing Partners took me under their wing as they helped architect what would become the contemporary global law firm. It was an education in scaling, economics, management, and Big Law as big business.

The partnership structure rewarded leverage, billable hours, origination, and profitability. Those incentives shaped behavior and culture. I quickly realized that the practice of law and the business of law were not always aligned. Nor was the partnership model—at least in this case—well suited to hundreds of partners, many of whom did not know one another, working across geographically dispersed offices and different billing rates. Partner compensation rewarded origination more than teamwork. The firm operated as a large collection of partner tents in a firm bazaar. Scale without alignment creates fragmentation. Finley Kumble taught me that lesson early.

I subsequently founded and managed a multi-city national litigation boutique. That was my first sustained entrepreneurial experience. Serving sophisticated multinational clients required more than excellent legal work. We experimented with flatter structures, greater early-career responsibility, collaboration, fixed-fee pricing, and technology. The common thread was how could we improve the client's experience and business outcomes?

Technology became an important element of our model and delivery—but not for its own sake. In 1991, I asked AT&T, one of our largest clients, whether it could digitally connect our geographically dispersed offices and link them to our major clients. Within months, we had a digital law library accessible from lawyers' desks, videoconferencing among offices and major clients, and centralized telecommunications. Technology was the enabler, not the transformer. Its value was in making geographically dispersed offices operate and feel like a unified whole by connecting people, knowledge, clients, and purpose. It fulfilled the objectives we outlined to AT&T. I did not focus on the cost but on the value it delivered. That was achieved in no small measure by the clarity of

expectations between buyer and seller.

Another important lesson came while I was representing a Fortune 10 company in a litigation involving multi-billion dollar exposure. A director interrupted my presentation to the Board about ten minutes into it. He turned to the General Counsel. “You told us Mark is a terrific civil trial lawyer,” he said. “I don’t doubt that, but he sure sounds more like a business executive to me.” A light came on. Clients want answers to multifaceted business challenges that include legal. The trusted adviser understands that distinction.

Serving as outside general counsel to three insurance companies put me on the other side of the table. I spent more time with the company CEOs than with lawyers. My remit expanded from cases and portfolios to the enterprise itself, and I was frequently part of a small group whose input affected business judgments. Legal mattered most when it was not confined by narrow “legal” boundaries.

Opposing a cadre of exceptional plaintiff class-action firms—and later collaborating with some of them—taught another lesson. Their contingency-fee model imposed discipline: rigorous case selection, efficiency, and close alignment with client outcomes. Economic models do more than determine how professionals are paid. They shape behavior and culture.

A federal judge in the Southern District of New York appointed me Permanent Receiver—effectively CEO—of an international aviation business operating across four continents. This was concurrent with the winding down of my practice career. Suddenly, legal expertise was only one part of the job. I was responsible for the enterprise—its people, customers, operations, finances, Government relations, and business judgments. Seeing legal from

the CEO perspective underscored how functionally siloed law was and how much more impactful it could be with a broader, clearer mandate. In the ensuing decades, that is precisely what has happened.

By the end of my practice career, law's self-regulated moat and siloed function seemed increasingly artificial. I wanted to test whether thirty years of ideas about clients, economics, technology, talent, and delivery could work in the marketplace. Spoiler alert: a transformative business model does not deliver robust returns if the market is not ready for it.

Clearspire: Built to Transform, Undone by Rigidity

Towards the end of my practice career, I wanted to shift from representing clients to transforming the delivery of legal services at scale. Clients remained my central focus—how could legal services be reimagined to better meet their objectives in an analog world transitioning to a digital one? I had no desire to write a book about how this might be done. My goal was to leverage thirty years of ideas drawn from diverse practice experience, build a transformative platform, and introduce it to the marketplace.

That was the genesis of Clearspire, an early "two-company model" legal organization. It comprised a law firm that engaged in the practice of law and a service company that supplied the law firm's technology, operational infrastructure, staffing, and business support. The structure also responded to a self-regulated system that restricted non-lawyer ownership and investment in law firms.

My co-founder and I began not with technology or the conventional law-firm model but with the client. We imagined what legal delivery might look like if it were reverse engineered from the customer perspective. During nearly three years of development, we integrated structure, economics, technology, talent, data, and forged a cohesive culture into a new operating model. The organizing principle was to align legal delivery with changing client needs.

The resulting two-company structure separated regulated legal practice from the business and technological infrastructure supporting it. Clearspire Law practiced law. Clearspire Service Company supplied the platform, business professionals, capital,

and operational support. Coral, our proprietary platform, connected lawyers and clients to matters, workflow, budgets, documents, and institutional knowledge. We reduced real-estate burden and replaced a hierarchical, pyramidal structure with a flat one, employed experienced lawyers to avoid client subsidized post-graduate lawyer training, favored fixed budgets over billable hours, and provided clients direct access to all their matters and the intellectual capital their engagements produced.

The model attracted considerable attention. The Economist, The Wall Street Journal's CIO Journal, Fast Company, and legal-technology analyst Ron Friedmann were among those that examined Clearspire, its two-company structure, technology, economics, and approach to legal delivery. The coverage was gratifying, but it did not persuade enough customers to embrace our entire integrated transformation model. Nor did it pay the bills.

The commercial problem was not lack of industry interest. My co-founder and I met with approximately 300 Fortune 500 general counsel during a sixteen-month period. Many admired what we had built but wanted only pieces of it. Several wanted to license or white-label Coral. Others requested Clearspire Law to provide flexible staffing. A few premier law firms proposed strategic partnerships. We declined them all.

Big ideas usually involve big gambles. Ours was believing that clients would embrace the integrated model as enthusiastically as we had embraced building it.

We had become slaves to the elegance of our own vision. That was the irony. We had reverse engineered Clearspire around the client, yet when clients told us how they were prepared to consume what we had built, we resisted. We wanted them to embrace the

integrated model on our terms and timetable. They wanted to take pieces of it on theirs. One of Clearspire's most enduring lessons was: give clients what they want, when they want it—not what you want them to take, when you want them to take it. If you cannot compromise on the elegance of the idea, do not expect the client to pay for it.

Clearspire closed in 2014. Its economic failure was self-evident. I had spent seven years without earning a dime at a significant lost opportunity cost. I also lost approximately $2 million I had put into the company. That was an outrageously large tuition but the education has proved invaluable.

Clearspire's success was nuanced and became visible only with time. In the years since it closed, the legal marketplace has moved toward many elements Clearspire integrated: distributed work, flatter talent models, professional business management, predictable pricing, technology-enabled workflow, and greater use of data and knowledge. Clearspire did not invent these elements, nor did the market evolve because of us. Its distinction was integrating them early around a single organizing principle: the client.

The original investment was lost; the lessons were not. Failure is useful only if we resist the temptation either to romanticize it or run from it. Understanding what went wrong—and, sometimes only with time, what proved right—helps determine what comes next.

The market had not caught up with Clearspire when we needed it to. The company closed; the unfinished business set me on a new course.

Unfinished Business and a Wider Lens

Clearspire's twilight coincided with an invitation to keynote the inaugural ReInvent Law NYC, the catalyst of a growing movement to modernize the legal industry. Nearly a thousand people gathered at Cooper Union's Great Hall in downtown Manhattan. The venue had long been a platform for ideas that challenged the status quo: Abraham Lincoln's 1860 "Right Makes Might" address helped propel him toward the presidency; Frederick Douglass spoke there on abolition and emancipation; and Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton helped advance women's suffrage from its stage. The Great Hall also hosted formative gatherings of the labor and civil-rights movements. It was an ideal venue for a gathering challenging law's legacy ecosystem.

The title of my talk—The Legal Delivery Model: A Post-Cubist Paradigm—was intentionally not the usual "legal" fare. Since the subject was reinvention, there was little reason to confine the title or its central metaphors to law. Cubism rejected a single fixed perspective, fragmented the familiar, and invited the viewer to see and reconstruct it differently. Picasso's Three Musicians suggested something more: distinct players, each retaining an individual identity, creating something coherent through interaction, improvisation, and collaboration. That was how I saw the legal marketplace.

The traditional law-firm hegemony was being challenged. Corporate legal departments were expanding and migrating more work in-house; technology companies, staffing businesses, outsourcers, process experts, consultants, allied professionals, and other providers were taking on work once performed almost

exclusively by law firms. Disaggregation exposed the pieces. But disaggregation was not transformation. The harder question was how the pieces could be reassembled around the customer. Their integration—not fragmentation—was the larger opportunity.

Clearspire had tried to answer that question within a single enterprise. After it closed, my focus shifted from our business to the market itself. Writing became an important part of that transition. As a regular Forbes contributor covering the global legal industry and, later, business strategy and transformation, I used the column as a laboratory for testing ideas against evidence and suggesting new models. The recurring reference point was the customer.

The market signals rarely arrived labeled as part of the same story. Corporate legal departments were assuming greater control over work and spend. Alternative providers and capital were entering the market. Technology and data were changing how work could be performed, distributed, and measured. Clients wanted greater transparency, predictability, and accountability—especially from law firms.

The signals were not confined to legal, nor was legal change principally organic. Much of it was being driven from outside the profession—by globalization, technology, capital, the increasing speed and complexity of business, and a more fluid marketplace. Work was being outsourced, insourced, right-sourced, automated, or performed by allied professionals and niche workers. The longstanding conflation of legal practice with the business of delivering legal services was beginning to break down. Practice remained the province of lawyers. Delivery increasingly opened legal careers to allied legal professions—technologists, risk and operations managers, data analysts, and finance experts.

Considered separately, each concurrent development appeared incremental. Viewed together, they suggested something larger: legal change was less organic and more the byproduct of something larger. Legal change was part of a broader transformation of business. My writing examined how business was reshaping the legal industry and how the gap between law and business was expanding, not narrowing.

Careers, companies, and professions are frequently disrupted not because change arrives without warning but because concurrent developments are mistaken for isolated events. My writing increasingly focused on the larger pattern: what were digitally transforming businesses and an increasingly underserved society beginning to require from legal?

Hemingway's famous description of bankruptcy—"Two ways. Gradually and then suddenly."—captures something essential about transformation. What seems sudden is often the accumulated consequence of developments that were visible but not yet understood as part of the same story. Recognizing the pattern is not clairvoyance; it requires curiosity, perspective, and a willingness to challenge conventional assumptions.

Clearspire had shown me the cost of being early. What followed was an effort to distinguish a premature idea from one whose time had come—and to meet the buyer where the buyer is.

Learning From Different Perspectives

Writing was one part of my next chapter. Academic appointments in the United States, Europe, and Australia, lectures to professional groups around the world, think tanks, and strategic advisory roles exposed me to people and institutions that approached familiar problems from very different perspectives. My focus was rarely doctrinal law. It was on the forces reshaping professional life—business, technology, economics, risk, organizational change, and changing client expectations. The countries and institutions varied; the forces transforming law were remarkably similar.

Bright people who have not yet been fully indoctrinated into legal culture often ask the most probing question: “Why?” Teaching reminded me of something I learned early in my career: expertise can deepen understanding, but it can also turn assumptions into accepted truths. Teaching became another form of learning.

My role as the inaugural Distinguished Scholar of the Singapore Academy of Law offered an especially revealing setting. Singapore connected Government, the judiciary, regulators, business, technology, education, and law within a broader national economic and societal strategy. Law was not treated simply as a profession. It was also infrastructure for commerce, trade, institutional stability, and the rule of law.

But my most enduring Singapore lesson came not from Government officials, business leaders, Supreme Court judges, regulators, or scholars. It came from a law student. After a lecture to students and faculty at the National University of Singapore Faculty of Law, a student showed me around the campus. We

discussed his imminent entry into the profession, and I asked how he viewed becoming a lawyer. His answer was stunning in its simplicity and depth: he regarded law as a skill, not a practice.

The observation stayed with me and became the subject of my 2019 Forbes article, What's A Lawyer Now? Law's Shift From Practice To Skill. It captured a transition already underway. Legal work, once largely the exclusive province of lawyers, was beginning to open to others with the skillsets, training, and experience to perform it. This shift challenged the profession's longstanding assumption that legal expertise and legal delivery were synonymous with lawyers and law firms.

England and Wales provided an early regulatory marker of that shift. Sir David Clementi's landmark 2004 review challenged restrictions on competition and the traditional structures through which legal services were regulated and delivered. Its recommendations helped shape the Legal Services Act 2007, which promoted competition and enabled new ownership and delivery models involving lawyers and non-lawyers. The Act identifies only six categories of "reserved legal activities" that may be performed only by appropriately authorized or exempt persons. That does not restrict lawyers from performing other work; it restricts others from performing those six reserved activities without the required authorization. Much of the broader universe of legal work is not reserved exclusively to licensed lawyers.

That distinction has become increasingly important. Legal work is no longer restricted to activities that require a licensed lawyer. It can involve—and increasingly depends upon—"allied legal professionals": technologists, data analysts, project and operations professionals, tax experts, accountants, talent specialists, process designers, and others whose expertise complements traditional

legal skills. Depending upon the task and jurisdiction, they can perform work independently or as part of multidisciplinary teams alongside lawyers. Technology, and now AI, expands that universe further.

This is not a diminution of lawyers so much as a redefinition of their role. Legal training remains enormously valuable, but it is no longer the sole qualification for contributing to legal problem-solving and delivery. Increasingly, value comes from combining legal knowledge and judgment with business, technology, data, finance, operations, and other disciplines. A legal background, once associated principally with a linear practice career, now provides multiple tracks.

The Singaporean law student had described more than his own future. His observation is even more prescient in the AI era: as machines perform more work once requiring professional knowledge, the value of legal training may increasingly lie in how it is combined with other skills, judgment, experience, and applied in new contexts. Law is becoming less a professional destination than a foundational skill that can be deployed across an expanding range of roles and disciplines.

The Digital Legal Exchange, an international not-for-profit think tank I co-founded with Bill Deckelman, tested these ideas in an enterprise setting. Its approximately fifty multinational member companies brought senior legal leaders together with business colleagues and a multidisciplinary faculty. Members shared challenges, benchmarked progress, and developed practical solutions designed to accelerate digital transformation of the corporate legal function and connect it more closely to the enterprise and its customers.

The premise became fundamental to my thinking: digital transformation is an enterprise challenge, not simply a legal one. No single discipline sees the entire organizational challenge. Business, technology, data, organizational thinking, and law each provide a different lens. Connecting them provides perspective; integrating their expertise, data, and institutional knowledge creates the possibility of transformation.

Erik Brynjolfsson, Director of the Stanford Digital Economy Lab and a senior fellow at Stanford's Institute for Human-Centered AI, has been especially influential in my thinking about technology, productivity, and the lag between technological capability and institutional adaptation. In an interview I conducted with him, he observed that technology was approximately twenty years ahead of our ability to optimize its use. His research with Daniel Rock and Chad Syverson describes a related phenomenon as the Productivity J-Curve: transformative technologies often require substantial complementary investment in organizations and people before productivity gains become visible.

The J-Curve poses an intriguing AI-era question: will AI compress the adoption lag because it accelerates learning and experimentation, or widen it because technological capability is advancing faster than organizations and institutions can adapt? A related question is whether AI will sharpen human critical thinking or encourage us to outsource too much of it to machines. Either way, technological capability alone does not produce transformation. Institutions—and the people within them—must adapt.

My selection as an Accenture Luminary provided another vantage point. Few organizations possess Accenture's combination of brand, technology, talent, global reach, data, and transformation

capability. Working alongside its leaders and some of its large clients reinforced a lesson that sounds paradoxical coming from someone advising organizations on transformation: transformation cannot be outsourced.

Consultants can bring expertise, technology, methodology, comparative experience, and an outsider's ability to see what those inside an organization may not. They can challenge assumptions, connect dots, design a game plan, and produce dazzling PowerPoint presentations. But they are coaches, not players. Transformation occurs inside the organization—among the people who must change how they work, share information, make decisions, measure performance, allocate authority, and sometimes surrender practices and privileges that helped create the existing culture. Leadership must make the case for change and create the conditions for it. The organization must own it.

Mike Tyson memorably captured the distance between strategy and experience: "Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth." Transformation delivers plenty of punches. Strategy encounters culture, incentives, institutional resistance, competing priorities, personalities, budgets, fear, and the unexpected. That is why designing transformation and living through it are different disciplines. The first requires expertise. The second requires expertise plus resilience, judgment, adaptation, trust, and collective determination when the game plan inevitably collides with reality. Perspective helps us see what must change. Experience teaches us what it takes to change it.

Two Different Roads to a Similar Destination: Richard Susskind

Richard Susskind is the author of a shelf full of books that have shaped thinking about technology and the professions for several decades. His books have influenced public policy, the legal services industry, and a generation of lawyers around the world; Tomorrow's Lawyers became an international bestseller. I think of him as "law's Nostradamus"—a great scholar who combines a legal background, a deep understanding of technology, and an unusual ability to read signals before most others see them and assemble them into a picture of what is around the corner.

My perspective has been forged by different experiences. I am a self-described "pracademic"—someone who appreciates a good footnote but prefers being in the scrum. My natural habitat is solving business problems, building client-centric business models, and advancing the alignment and integration of legal into business transformation. Richard has generally looked at the future through the lens of what technology makes possible. I have focused on the customer/organizational problem and how technology, business, process, people, and new delivery models can combine to solve it.

Richard and I had followed each other's work for years. COVID provided the catalyst to collaborate—and created a captive remote audience. From April through July 2020, we participated in a four-part series called The Uncertain Decade. Thomson Reuters described Richard and me as "two of the most respected names in the legal industry." More than 5,000 people from 90 countries subscribed, and the conversations generated Thomson Reuters

articles, live blogs, social media commentary, and press coverage around the world.

The Uncertain Decade reflected more than the impact of the pandemic. COVID had confirmed uncertainty as the "new normal," even as accelerating technological, economic, demographic, regulatory, and customer-driven forces had already begun reshaping the legal industry. Our sessions were billed as debates but were actually free-flowing fireside chats—more about nuance than fundamental disagreement. We were reading signals from different vantage points, connecting them, and considering what their integration might mean for legal services during the 2020s. How far would transformation progress by the end of the decade? Prediction was never the point. Reading the signals, connecting them, and considering their implications was.

COVID also cast a harsh light on the legal establishment's resistance to change. The technology that enabled the legal ecosystem to continue operating when offices and courthouses closed had existed for years. What changed was not the technology but the necessity of using it. When resistance was no longer a viable option, tools and ways of working that had been resisted or marginally adopted were deployed quickly, widely, and effectively.

COVID supplied a real-world demonstration of the point. The technological capability had existed for years; necessity compressed the adaptation cycle. Processes, behaviors, and ways of working changed because they had to. The legal industry did not suddenly acquire new technology—it finally used capabilities it already possessed.

Richard and I continued our discussion in a very different and private setting two years later. I was invited to deliver the keynote,

Law in an Uncertain Decade, at the University of Strathclyde's 28th Annual Ross Priory Retreat on Loch Lomond. The annual Chatham House Rule gathering brought together a select group drawn from the senior judiciary, academia, the profession, and the legal industry. My keynote became the starting point rather than the end of the discussion. The question period and ensuing conversation extended for hours. People with different experiences, perspectives, and nuanced disagreements shared a desire to advance problem solving. Questions sharpened ideas, assumptions were challenged, and individual perspectives were integrated into a collective whole.

Collaboration of that kind is fertile ground for new approaches to problems worth solving.

Law Is Part of a Larger Business and Societal Whole

The Ross Priory discussion raised a larger question: what is law's role in a business and societal environment being transformed by digital technology and AI? The answer cannot be found by looking at law in isolation. Legal transformation is part of something larger—business and societal transformation. It requires reimagining legal from the perspective of those it serves—and those it does not presently serve—and integrating legal more fully into that larger business and societal whole. That requires a different mindset about legal's purpose, how it operates, and the value it can create.

My work with The Economist and Economist Impact reinforced that view. As program adviser and moderator of General Counsel (now Chief Legal) Officer Summits, I participated in discussions placing legal at the intersection of enterprise strategy, risk, geopolitics, technology, and governance. Moderating the Economist Impact Business Innovation Summit gave me an opportunity to advance a thesis that had become central to my work: business innovation must include legal. Law's untapped value lies in operating cross-functionally—strategically, not tactically; proactively, not reactively; and embedded across the enterprise to detect and mitigate risk before it metastasizes, not after.

Collaborating as an outside adviser with Shell's Scenario team was an eye-opening experience. Shell has engaged in scenario planning for more than half a century. Its planners explored the possibility of an oil-supply shock and the growing power of OPEC well before the 1973 crisis. When it came, Shell was better prepared than many competitors to respond decisively and quickly. The value of scenario planning is not predicting the future but preparing for

reasonably foreseeable possibilities by seeing, connecting, and responding to signals.

Shell's execution was exceptional—no doubt sixty years of practice helps. A multidisciplinary group engaged in what I can best describe as high-octane critical thinking and signal interpretation, injected with creativity—a potent blend. Functional boundaries, titles, and hubris were left at the door. The question was not who owned the problem, but what the signals meant, their interconnectedness, and how the enterprise should prepare.

That discipline has even greater relevance in the AI era. Risk is increasingly interconnected, real-time, and capable of a domino effect. Protecting the brand is particularly challenging in an age of social media, polarization, and unreliable sources. AI adds extraordinary capability but also elevates risk. Scenario planning need not be the preserve of global companies with vast resources. The discipline can be adapted to scale and circumstance. “It’s too burdensome” is not a winning strategy.

Legal has an important role to play in business foresight, risk and crisis management, and strategic insight. Legal is a strategic enterprise asset—and an underutilized one. Its value extends far beyond traditional “legal” work. Legal's institutional knowledge, data, relationships, risk intelligence, and judgment can be applied predictively and proactively across the business. The legal function has historically been siloed and reactive. That must change.

That is why I wrote the Forbes article Legal Transformation Is A Business Story. The most consequential forces changing legal delivery were increasingly coming from the businesses it served, not organically from within the profession. Legal too often conflates incremental improvement of legacy models with transformation.

Titles and self-styled “innovation” teams do not transform organizations. Organizational structures, economic models, creative, purpose-driven leadership, resources, authority, metrics, and time do.

The first step is alignment: legal must embrace enterprise purpose, customer orientation, risk tolerance, strategy, and business metrics while working cross-functionally and at the speed of the organization it serves. Alignment prepares the ground for something more consequential—legal’s eventual integration into the larger enterprise whole.

Law Is Also Part of a Societal Whole

Law is part of another whole—the society the profession is sworn to serve.

I have described law as “a tale of two markets.” Corporate law receives the bulk of the attention because that is where the big money, influence, and power reside. Its resources are vast and competition for clients is intense—not only among law firms, but increasingly with corporate legal teams, multidisciplinary professional-service organizations, technology-enabled providers, and frontier AI companies. Capital is flowing into legal, new delivery models are proliferating, and technology is reshaping how legal work is performed, by whom, and for whom.

The individual and small-business market is an entirely different story—and receives far less attention. The profession has failed for decades to meet much of its demand. Derek Bok, former President of Harvard University and Dean of its Law School, distilled law's distribution problem in a 1983 address to Harvard's overseers: “There is far too much law for those that can afford it and far too

little for those that cannot." Four decades later, the Legal Services Corporation's Justice Gap study found that low-income Americans received no or inadequate legal help for 92% of their civil legal problems. The technology, capital, talent, and innovation transforming the corporate market have yet to close that gap.

This is more than an access problem. It implicates the profession's social compact. I have long maintained that lawyers serve two clients simultaneously: the client who retains them and society at large. Lawyers enjoy unusual privileges—notably self-regulation—but those privileges carry corresponding responsibilities to the legal system and the public. Lawyer oaths vary by jurisdiction, but their common obligations include supporting the Constitution and faithfully discharging professional duties. The profession is not simply a business. It is also a steward of the rule of law.

That stewardship matters because public confidence is the currency of legal institutions. Gallup reports that trust in the federal judicial branch, which stood at 71% in 1974, has fallen to 46% in 2026; Supreme Court job approval is just 34%. Those dismal numbers speak to the severity of the problem—lawyers and legal institutions are hemorrhaging public trust. Untreated, this can be fatal to the rule of law and the democracy it helps support.

This is not solely an American problem. The World Justice Project's 2025 Rule of Law Index found rule-of-law deterioration in 68% of the countries it measured. The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index 2024 reported an eighth consecutive year of decline in democratic strength.

The gravity of the problem is an overlooked dimension of legal transformation. Technology, new delivery models, capital, and enterprise integration matter enormously, but they are means, not

ends. Transformation must also address the crisis in access to legal services, erosion of trust in lawyers, legal institutions, and the rule of law, and fulfillment of the legal profession's social compact. Law's societal role cannot be separated from the health of the institutions and democratic systems it supports.

Law is a tale of two markets, but the business and societal segments are interconnected. A deeply rooted rule of law is not only a guarantor of rights; it is also infrastructure for commerce. Companies and citizens both depend upon stable institutions, enforceable rights, credible courts, functioning markets, and public trust. A healthy legal system is an essential component of a society's social, economic, political, and democratic infrastructure.

That is the larger opportunity of legal transformation: to unlock law's latent value across both markets—to integrate legal capability more fully with the enterprises it serves while making it more accessible and responsive to society. Business does not operate apart from society, and society relies on trusted institutions and the rule of law for social cohesion.

What value can law create when its knowledge, data, problem solving, critical thinking, judgment, technology, processes, talent, and professional obligations are aligned with, then integrated across, business and society? How do we achieve it? That is a question both segments of the legal industry—together with business and society—should ponder.

AI: Transformation's "Suddenly"

Transformation is an often misused term. It is not synonymous with change, improvement, innovation, automation, or greater efficiency. Those can all contribute to transformation without producing it. As I wrote in the Forbes article Creating A Gen AI-Era Legal Function, "Transformation is not about improving output and efficiency within the legacy organizational and delivery paradigm; it is about recasting the legal function through the lens of the enterprise, customers, and society." Transformation changes the paradigm, not simply the performance of its existing parts.

It also has a purpose. Transformation is not change for its own sake, nor is technology its destination. Transformation's North Star is the customer: better outcomes, experience, access, choice, transparency, speed, predictability, and value. For legal, the aperture is wider still. The function must create enterprise value while honoring its responsibilities to society and the rule of law. Transformation is ultimately measured by whom it serves and the value it creates.

Legal had been changing gradually for decades before generative AI burst onto the scene. Automation replaced repetitive, low-value work—it posed little threat to knowledge-based professionals, including lawyers. Disaggregation separated tasks once bundled together and performed almost exclusively by law firms. Managed-services businesses, ALSPs, niche business-of-law providers, legal technology companies, multidisciplinary professional-services organizations, legal operations, and allied legal professionals gradually captured a growing share of delivery. Technology and data changed how work could be performed, allocated, managed,

and measured. Corporate legal departments expanded, more work migrated in-house, and a growing number of legal teams began transitioning from siloed departments into cross-functional business units.

Each was a signal that gradual change was occurring, but the legacy legal paradigm remained largely intact. One manifestation was the widening gap between law firms and corporate legal teams. The migration of work in-house was commonly attributed to cost; the deeper issue was value—whether output warranted the cost and advanced the client's objectives. Firms remained largely input-focused, while corporate teams were increasingly accountable for outcomes, budgets, enterprise risk, collaboration, and business value.

The divide extended beyond metrics to organizational structures, economics, technology, data, institutional knowledge, and incentives. Valuable information generated during representation was rarely shared, much less integrated across the legal supply chain. Many firms improved internal efficiency and called it innovation, but left their underlying models and culture largely intact. Improvement was occurring; transformation was not.

That gap created an opening for customers to reconfigure their legal supply chains. Managed-service providers, ALSPs, niche specialists, technology companies, and multidisciplinary organizations expanded as corporate legal leaders asserted greater control over which work required which resource, at what price, and with what mix of lawyers, allied professionals, process, data, and technology. Business—not legal acting alone—was beginning to pull law into its own transformation journey.

Business gradually began transforming its in-house legal teams.

"Legal" was becoming less about lawyers and law firms and more a multidisciplinary, tech-enabled, data-backed function designed to solve business problems and produce value. Corporate teams were operating less as siloed legal departments and more as business units with legal expertise. I described CLOs as "law's astronauts"—the first to explore the new frontiers of the legal function, paving the way for others to expand its traditional boundaries. They were increasingly operating at the intersection of law, business, technology, data, risk, and enterprise value.

Then came November 30, 2022.

The public release of ChatGPT revealed the astonishing advances of generative AI. They were met with awe and angst—the latter initially predominant among lawyers and other professionals. Within two months, ChatGPT was estimated to have reached 100 million monthly active users. For lawyers and other knowledge professionals, the significance extended far beyond another technological advance. Machines could draft, research, analyze, summarize, synthesize, and produce sophisticated written work in seconds. Activities long associated with professional expertise—and the economic moat surrounding them—were suddenly being challenged. Professional hegemony over knowledge seemingly vanished. At the same time, the prospect of legal transformation became real.

Hemingway's "gradually and then suddenly" captured the pace of legal change. AI did not create legal transformation. It compressed its timetable and exposed the fragility of assumptions that had long supported law's legacy paradigm. It challenged who—or what—performs knowledge work, how expertise is created and distributed, how organizations and economic models are structured, and where professional value resides.

AI alone cannot produce transformation. Technological capability, however powerful, does not cause organizations to discard legacy structures, economic models, incentives, cultures, or ways of working. Bolting AI onto them—the current rage—may make existing processes faster and cheaper, but that alone does not respond to changing customer expectations and needs. That requires a fundamental reimagination of how better to serve end-users in a rapidly changing business environment.

Transformation starts with asking tough questions in the existential mirror. What is our organization's purpose? What do we need to fulfill it? How do we create a business model that will enable us to achieve it? How are we differentiated from others in our space? What problems are worth solving? What should be redesigned rather than accelerated? What outcomes matter to end-users? How can legal contribute more effectively to enterprise value? How can it better fulfill its responsibilities to society? What combination of human and machine capability, organizational structure, economics, process, data, talent, and culture is required to achieve those objectives?

AI also brings to the fore another set of questions: What remains distinctively valuable about human experience? AI can mine, analyze, connect, and synthesize enormous amounts of information at extraordinary speed and with rapidly increasing accuracy. Consequential decisions are not based solely on information. They require context—history, culture, relationships, incentives, and nuance. They also require intuition; sometimes the stated problem is not the underlying one.

Knowledge is not judgment. Judgment weighs competing considerations and determines what should be done in particular circumstances. Wisdom goes further: not simply what can be done,

but what should be done—and why. AI raises a larger question of agency and purpose: what role should machines play, what remains human responsibility, and who is directing whom?

The challenge is no longer simply obtaining information. It is identifying which signals matter, connecting them with experience and context, determining what those connections mean, and applying that understanding to problems worth solving.

That brings legal transformation back to its genesis: the end-user of its products and services. How can a reimagined, AI-enabled, data-backed, ethical legal function better serve business as well as society at large?

Integration: Transformation's Culminating Phase

Transformation begins with an unflinching assessment of the organization from the customer's perspective. Purpose, culture, differentiation, operating and economic models, talent, technology, data, processes, capital, supply chain, and strategic partners are all on the change table. Each produces signals to be read not only individually, but collectively. The organizational mosaic must be laid out before its pieces can be assessed and reassembled.

That process has three stages: connection, alignment, and integration.

Connection is seeing relationships that functional specialization and organizational silos often obscure. It combines experience and expertise to understand how one signal, capability, problem, or opportunity bears upon another—and what that relationship means. Connecting the dots provides a wider field of vision. It does not, by itself, make the pieces fit.

Alignment is the bridge. It organizes connected elements around common purpose and objectives. Data and institutional knowledge are shared; incentives and metrics are reconciled; the supply chain is coordinated; functional boundaries blur; and the workforce—not senior management alone—understands why change is necessary, that it is not punitive, and that participation is required.

Integration is transformation's culminating stage. Aligned elements no longer operate principally as distinct components; they function as a unified system. Their value is exponential, not merely additive. This value amplification applies throughout an enterprise. Data's

yield is increased when it is shared across business functions and combined with institutional knowledge. Technology is more powerful when it operates as an enterprise platform rather than a checkerboard of disconnected point solutions. Talent creates more value when it is agile and can be deployed across functional boundaries to collaborate on enterprise priorities.

McKinsey found that companies that frequently reallocate talent to high-value initiatives are more than twice as likely to outperform peers on total shareholder returns. Its broader research reinforces the point: high-performing organizations transform across interconnected dimensions rather than concentrating change in a single function. Integration, not isolated excellence, is the objective. In an increasingly interconnected, high-risk, geopolitically unstable, regulatorily complex, and fiercely competitive environment, transformation is an existential imperative.

Legal presents the same integration challenge in two dimensions. As I have written, the legal function must first integrate the practice of law with the business of delivering legal products and services at scale—technology, process, data, operations, allied professionals, and the resources comprising its supply chain. Second, that integrated legal capability must itself be integrated with and across the wider enterprise.

The first dimension remains a work-in-progress. Corporate legal departments operate across a supply chain of law firms, managed-service and alternative providers, consultants, technology companies, data providers, allied professionals, and increasingly machines. Each may perform capably, but disconnected excellence is not transformation. Disaggregation of legal tasks created new options. But the value of those options is diluted if they are not aligned and ultimately integrated.

Connection recognizes how the pieces relate. Alignment coordinates them. Integration converts them into a system committed to continuous improvement. That requires curiosity, agility, discipline, common purpose, and an integrated workforce.

The second dimension is broader and potentially more valuable. Legal intersects with finance, risk, compliance, procurement, product, cybersecurity, human resources, operations, sales, Government relations, customers, and strategy. Legal's data, institutional knowledge, experience, problem solving, critical thinking, and judgment become more valuable when embedded throughout the business. That enables legal to operate proactively, not reactively, and to participate in strategic decisions rather than simply contend with their consequences. A proactive legal function strengthens enterprise defense while helping identify and capture business opportunities. It also enables legal to exercise its ethical stewardship of the business in real time, not after the fact.

A transformed legal function must not only speak the language of business and understand its risk tolerance and customers but also operate at the speed of business. Decision-making is more challenging—and compressed—than ever. Unless legal is integrated, it cannot participate meaningfully in that process. Legal has an unprecedented opportunity to apply predictive and analytical data to compress contract drafting and negotiation, promote dispute avoidance and early resolution, focus mergers and acquisitions on material issues, and accelerate due diligence. This will free lawyers to spend less time on legacy "legal practice" tasks and more on high-value business challenges where their legal training, experience, critical thinking, and judgment can be leveraged.

Legal transformation requires challenging the function's purpose in

a business environment and world being reshaped by digital transformation and AI. Law has long been insular, and its scant metrics reflect it. They overwhelmingly measure the provider's financial performance: billable hours, rates, realization, revenue, leverage, and profit per partner. Law's traditional Holy Grail is profit-per-partner (PPP), not net promoter score (NPS). There is nothing inherently objectionable about profitability; every sustainable business must produce it. The issue is alignment. When provider revenue is driven principally by time and input while the customer measures value by outcomes, experience, speed, predictability, and price, the economic model can place provider and customer interests in tension.

Business starts with the customer. It asks whether the product or service solves a problem, produces the desired outcome, warrants its price, and creates an experience that causes the customer to return. Customer-centricity focuses on what the customer needs rather than what the provider sells. That is the critical distinction: not profit versus value, but a business model in which profit derives from delivering value rather than one in which the provider's economic incentives can conflict with it.

A legal function cannot credibly claim integration with the business while measuring success principally by criteria the business itself does not use. That is why the transformation underway inside corporate legal departments is so significant. Leading in-house teams are increasingly operating and being held accountable as other business units are: against outcomes, budgets, enterprise objectives, customer needs, data, and measurable value. That does not strip lawyers of professional independence, ethical obligations, or judgment. It embeds those qualities within the business and makes the legal function accountable for how effectively it deploys

them.

The distinction is especially clear when input and output are compared. Traditional law-firm economics monetize input—principally time. Business measures output and asks whether the value of the product or service warrants its price. The transformation opportunity is not to eliminate legitimate provider economics; it is to align them more closely with the outcomes customers value.

Peter Drucker said, “If you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it.” Law certainly measures. The more revealing question is what it measures and whose definition of value those metrics reflect. As legal becomes more integrated with business, its metrics must broaden from provider economics to include customer and enterprise outcomes. Baseball offers a useful analogy for how that evolution can occur.

Baseball has long measured individual performance, but its metrics evolved to measure something more consequential: how individual performance contributes to team outcomes. Sabermetrics supplemented familiar statistics with measures designed to identify value and contribution to winning. Moneyball demonstrated that data could expose undervalued talent, challenge pedigree and conventional wisdom, and produce better results with fewer resources. Law needs the equivalent—not the abandonment of its traditional metrics, but additional ones that reveal customer value and contribution to collective outcomes.

Law’s metrics should evaluate relevant experience, skills, efficiency, quality, outcomes, customer satisfaction, and individual contribution to collective results. Data should augment judgment, not replace it. Pedigree and reputation should not substitute for

evidence of performance. And because consequential decisions will always retain a measure of judgment, to paraphrase Yogi Berra, legal metrics should be ninety percent objective and the other half subjective.

Transformation needs a scoreboard—not because everything of value can be reduced to a number, but because without meaningful metrics organizations too easily confuse activity with progress and adoption with value. Metrics create a feedback loop. They reveal what works, what does not, and where adjustment is required. More fundamentally, they align legal's economics and performance measures with customer and enterprise value.

Connection sees the relationships. Alignment gets the pieces working toward the same objectives. Integration makes them operate as a whole.

For legal, integration must occur twice: within the legal function and its supply chain, then between that integrated function and the enterprise. This can be a concurrent process. Only then can legal’s data, institutional knowledge, technology, talent, relationships, experience, and judgment be fully deployed on behalf of the business and its customers.

The Trusted Adviser

Knowledge has been the moat separating professionals from the general population. Knowledge has been their stock-in-trade. Artificial intelligence has changed that. What was once the almost-exclusive domain of trained professionals is now accessible to all. That does not mean that doctors, lawyers, and other licensed experts are unnecessary. But AI is already changing their terms of engagement as well as the organizational structures, economic models, workforces, and delivery systems they operate in. One consequence of this transformative dynamic is the relationship between professional and client/patient. There is likely to be less personal contact between the two, a more transactional relationship, and increasing reliance on AI and other advanced technologies in decision making.

Trusted advisers are a rarer breed among professionals. They transcend expertise and competence. Their judgment, wisdom, empathy, emotional intelligence, curiosity, and understanding of the client have been tested over time. The relationship is no longer transitory or transactional; it endures and often extends well beyond the trusted adviser's professional expertise.

Trusted-adviser status is earned, not self-proclaimed. It is bestowed by clients who have come to trust not only what an adviser knows, but who that person is, how they think, listen, exercise judgment, and respond when the stakes—business or personal—are high. Trusted advisers are sought when the question is: "What should I do?"

There is no "one size fits all" description of a trusted adviser. But there are some common traits: authenticity, discretion, candor, reliability, and the empathy to see the challenge from the client's

perspective. Trust deepens when advice is consistently balanced and sound, confidences are protected, difficult issues are discussed, and the interests of the client supersede the adviser's biases, ego, and economics.

Curiosity is another distinguishing characteristic. Trusted advisers are not constrained by legacy boundaries of their chosen field. They are often drawn to forces that affect it—business, technology, economics, geopolitics, culture, among others. They also stay abreast of circumstances affecting their clients. They look beyond the immediate issue and question how it connects with others. They do not reach hasty conclusions or accept conventional wisdom as fact. Trusted advisers are masters of nuance in a world increasingly too impatient to appreciate its importance.

That broad, considered perspective has elevated value in our world where change is a rare constant. The ability to identify points of intersection as well as connections—whether in personal matters or careers—is more important than ever. No single individual or discipline has all the answers. The trusted adviser does not purport to know everything but recognizes what matters, what is missing, where other expertise is required, and how disparate perspectives might yield the solution.

Trusted advisers are often collaborators and community builders. Over time, and through collaboration that builds trust, they develop relationships with people whose expertise, experience, and perspectives are often diverse, yet highly valued. They know whom to call, when to listen, and when to ask the question that connects one piece of the puzzle to another. Without compromising client confidences, they draw upon this wider community to expand their problem-solving reach. The distinctive skill is recognizing which pieces matter, how they connect, and assembling them before

rendering counsel. The trusted adviser provides clarity, not conformity.

Trust is an emotional safety net that allows the client to expose uncertainty, vulnerability, fear, ambition, institutional politics, and concerns that may not be readily shared with others. That candor supplies context no database, résumé, or professional credential can provide. The trusted adviser remains an expert but also becomes a confidant of the client. This combination connects the two not only in a professional way but also in a powerful human bond. Trust cannot be delegated, outsourced, or downloaded.

AI is rapidly making specialized knowledge and sophisticated analytical capability more accessible. It can synthesize enormous amounts of information, identify patterns, test assumptions, explore alternatives, and perform in seconds work that once required hours or days. Those capabilities will continue to improve. But access to knowledge is not the same as becoming a trusted adviser. That does not lock trusted advisers and AI in an existential zero-sum game. To the contrary, trusted advisers must understand what AI can do, where it can augment their knowledge and analysis, how it can expose alternatives or connections they might otherwise overlook, and where its limitations or potential threats require particular scrutiny. AI is another piece of the mosaic—an extraordinarily powerful one—to be integrated with experience, context, institutional knowledge, relationships, and human judgment.

I was on the receiving end of a trusted adviser when I was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2017. Soon after my surgery, I published a Forbes article about the experience, What A Cancer Diagnosis Reminded Me About Professionalism.

My physician was an accomplished specialist, but what impressed and reassured me was his manner, not simply his medical expertise. He was direct, matter-of-fact, calm, and confident. He synthesized a great deal of data and made it comprehensible. He laid out the treatment options and risks, acknowledged his own bias toward surgery, encouraged second and third opinions, and offered no guarantees. Most importantly, he did not treat me as a diagnosis or a statistic. He related the data and his experience to my particular circumstances, lifestyle, objectives, and risk profile. His approach mirrored mine as a practicing lawyer: no two clients —or patients—are the same, even when their problem appears similar. Understanding the individual patient/client's objectives is critical.

The experience crystallized what makes exceptional professionals across different fields. Professionals solve problems. The best of them meld knowledge with experience, recognize patterns without becoming formulaic, understand the limits of their expertise, continue learning, collaborate, communicate candidly, and know the client as well as the problem. They exude competence without braggadocio, confidence without cockiness. They do not “check their humanity at the door.” And when options exist, they do not impose their preferred solution simply because it is theirs. As I wrote then, “For professionals, it’s about the client, not themselves.”

That experience helped me understand something about trusted advisers that professional credentials cannot capture. Expertise is foundational, but it is not the distinction. The distinction is how knowledge, experience, judgment, curiosity, collaboration, empathy, candor, humility, and humanity are brought together in service of another person. The trusted adviser sees the problem and

the person confronting it; recognizes which pieces of the mosaic matter; knows when another perspective is needed; and exercises judgment about how those pieces fit the particular circumstances of the person who has reposed trust in them.

My late father, himself an eminent professional, once told me that "a pro can spot a pro quickly—no matter the field." My cancer experience made me understand what he meant. I ended the article with a realization that seems even more relevant in the AI age: when you are the one with the problem, being in the hands of a pro is immensely comforting. That, I wrote, is half the battle.

The trusted adviser is the epitome of that professional—and, I would add, the best of humanity. Knowledge may become more accessible and machines more capable. But when the stakes are highest and the question is "What should I do?", we want more than an answer. We seek someone whose expertise we respect, whose judgment we value, whose humanity we feel, and in whose care we trust.

The Unfinished Mosaic

When I was in my mid-20s, a young artist gave me the best career advice I have ever received. Over time, I realized her counsel was about something larger: becoming. I was a young lawyer frustrated by the constraints of my new profession. She advised me to master its language, then bring my creativity, curiosity, interests, and personality to it. At the time, I thought she was telling me how to become a better lawyer. Time and experience revealed it was advice about becoming.

Mastering a craft provides a foundation, not a boundary. Different people, disciplines, cultures, successes, failures, relationships, and unexpected turns widen our aperture. Some experiences reveal their significance immediately; others appear random until something later reveals the connection.

Creating a game plan is an excellent intellectual and inspirational exercise, but in a constantly changing, complex, and unpredictable world, our control is limited. Mike Tyson's take on game plans is apt. Most of us will get hit in the face—if not literally, then metaphorically. The question is what happens next. Do we say "no más" and signal defeat, or adjust, learn from what did not work, and take another approach? Resilience is not avoiding the punch. It is what enables us to absorb it, adjust, and remain in the fight.

Metrics shift in response to age, experience, circumstances, and evolving as a human being. Success in your 20s is different from success in your 50s—and so it goes. Careers evolve. Health intervenes. Children are born, and parents die. Relationships deepen, dissipate, or disappear. Priorities shift. Course correction is not an acknowledgment of failure; it is recognition—and response—to change.

At seventy-four, I remain curious and engaged, but in a different way than before. Most of my career was focused on self-advancement. That emphasis has shifted. The focus is now helping others adjust and advance, connecting people and ideas, sharing what experience has taught me, and continuing to learn from people whose experiences and perspectives differ from mine. It is less about “me” and more about “you” and “us.”

From childhood, I was instructed to be productive. What it means to be productive has shifted over time. Producing more is not necessarily the same as contributing more. Productivity for me has become less about volume and more about value—where experience, judgment, relationships, and time can make a difference.

Some things do not shift. The importance of reputation is one. Reputations are built over decades and can be destroyed in a moment. Reputation is more than professional currency. It is the accumulated consequence of choices—what we do when things are difficult, how we treat people when there is seemingly nothing to gain, whether our private conduct comports with our public persona, and whether people trust us when the stakes are high. Most importantly, our reputation extends far beyond our career and its rewards and accomplishments. Have we leveraged it to lift others? Are we loved and respected for who we are as a human being, not what we have achieved in our careers? Have we folded our hand or are we still in the game? Are we still curious and becoming?

Artificial intelligence arrives at an intriguing point in this journey. It can dramatically expand what we know and what we can do. But capability does not determine purpose, and knowledge does not confer wisdom. What we choose to do with either technology or

experience remains ours. The deepest value of both may lie not in what they enable us to know, but in what they enable us to contribute.

I don't define myself as any single part of my life—a lawyer who no longer practices, a father whose adult children I admire, a husband, friend, athlete whose principal physical activity is now walking, a cancer patient, or a son whose parents died years ago. Each is a piece of my mosaic. Each has shaped me but does not define me, nor do they collectively produce a finished person.

Perhaps that is what becoming means. We accumulate pieces without always knowing where they belong. Experience supplies some. Other people give us others. Curiosity causes us to examine them from different angles. Perspective reveals connections we once missed. And occasionally, we discover that a piece we thought was central belongs at the edge—or that something we scarcely noticed belongs near the center.

At seventy-four, I am still asking questions, connecting dots, challenging assumptions, learning from others, and trying to be useful. The priorities are different now, and so too are the metrics. The goal is not to finish the mosaic. It is to keep making it richer—and, increasingly, useful to others.

All journeys eventually end. Until then, there is unfinished business. The pieces of my career and life are still being assembled.