

Interview with Clio's "Lawyer in Residence" Joshua Lenon

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Clio's "Lawyer in Residence"

Delighted to be granted an interview with Clio's "Lawyer in Residence" Joshua Lenon, co-author Sharon Nelson asked Lenon to describe his duties as his title seemed a bit obscure. He laughed, no doubt having heard this query many times before.

As he described it, he does a veritable hodgepodge of jobs – all of which need a lawyer, but often requiring him to work with different groups. Clio has a wide range of professionals, officers, business development folks, IT and cybersecurity specialists, programmers, trainers, customer support professionals, etc. All of them need the benefit of Lenon's expertise somewhere along the way.

He offers advice on translating technology into advice that resonates with lawyers, he speaks at lots of conferences, he explains the requirements of HIPPA and state privacy/data breach laws – and importantly, the impact of the ethics rules as they apply to all that Clio (and its customers) do.

The Jump in Business and Revenues

Lenon talked about the large jump that lawyers have seen in the past year. More billable hours are a good thing, but where did they come? In part, Lenon speculates that the slowness of the courts may have contributed to law firm bottom lines as courts (and court dates) moved slowly, certainly increasing revenues for litigators as cases dragged on, were continued multiple times, etc. Litigation certainly moved at a snail's pace.

Across the board, it appeared that clients were ready to spend their monies to get business done – and where businesses did well, their lawyers benefitted too.

What About the Current Financial Instability?

Lenon made it clear that the Clio 2022 Legal Trends Report doesn't have the data to predict the financial future, especially the universal concern about inflation. However, he pointed out that firms have gotten MUCH more organized and innovative since the pandemic, which may allow them to stay in the black even if a serious recession strikes.

One other thing he noted was that the second biggest expense for law firms (after salaries) is office space. And yet here we were (as of October 2022) with only 30-35% of people in the office full time. With more people working from home (still), many firms have reduced their office space, also freeing up some funds.

Mind you, he cautions that there are reasons for time in the office working together, but also points to Clio's finding that 76% of lawyers want to set their own hours (not that they may

necessarily be allowed to do so). The Clio report noted that many more non-lawyers are spending increasing time at home, often with law firm laptops purchased during COVID, which are joined to and protected by the law firm network.

The situation remains fluid. Lenon noted that 1 in 5 lawyers changed jobs during the last year and 9% of lawyers plan to change jobs (as of the time of the survey).

The authors note that there has been a sudden marked slowdown of job changing in the legal sector, particular in lateral hiring, as the economy has caused more jitters. Which only goes to show you how fast things change in uncertain times.

What Do Clients Want from Lawyers These Days?

As law firms have evolved post-pandemic, there have been many changes that are attractive to clients. The steady rise in the use of client portals continues. Clients love the convenience of those portals. Weekend or evening hours have been adopted by a number of law firms.

What seems most obvious to Lenon is that clients value a good lawyer above all other things, many citing good reviews online as a compelling reason to select a particular lawyer. Good communication with clients is also a priority, but it doesn't need to be onerous. You can set client expectations by explaining that responses at night or on weekends are not to be expected – this can (and in the authors' minds should be) communicated in the engagement agreement.

Final Words of Advice

Lenon stressed the continuing need for creativity among law firms. Lawyers must be open to change, seeking to innovate to meet new challenges, particularly as they strive to attract new clients and keep current clients. Inspiration, he says, is key.

His parting words of advice as the interview ended came from Louis Pasteur: "Fortune favors the prepared mind." We concur – and thank Clio's "Lawyer in Residence" for taking the time to do the interview. We're looking forward to ClioCon 2023 already!

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