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# Perspectives

FROM THE CHAIR OF THE LAW PRACTICE MANAGEMENT SECTION

The question many of us have had over the past year or two is not “what is the future of law practice?” but more “has the future arrived?” As *Law Practice* tackles the subject in this issue, many lawyers are left wondering what their future will truly hold.

Unfortunately, one reality is that some will work longer than previously planned. Other lawyers will have to drastically alter the way their business is run. And yet some are finding the future to be more palatable than the past—promising opportunities that were previously considered “glass half empty,” if not simply foolhardy. Remember when the midsize model was dead, and having offices on every coast imaginable was considered a necessity? Yeah, 2007. I was so much older then, I’m younger than that now.

Most people have come to realize that the general thinking about hiring, billing, procedures and day-to-day client interaction has not simply shifted under the weight of a weak global economy, but is in many ways nothing short of a market correction that will take a lot longer than a decade to shift back in our favor.

I’m not suggesting that in 2020 law practice is going to be identical to today. Technologies not yet known will transform various elements of delivery, accessibility and function for a law firm, while world events will determine our roles as officers of the court. In shaking the Magic Eight Ball on my desk (courtesy of a law firm promotion), I’ve asked for some guidance. Generally, it has answered yes, no, not today or absolutely—but there were some predictions for the year 2020.

- The largest law firms will be larger than ever, but they will not be the same ones that are at the top of the heap today. They will be sharp upstarts that can capture the global market while adjusting a workable structure among partners.
- Legal information and research will be free, provided by engines and entities that believe in public information and have other ways to generate a profit.
- Law school graduates entering the job market will be armed with a stronger set of core business principles and a little less Socratic Method learning.
- Corporate America will flex its muscles a little more, reminding us that forcing down the price of a lawyer is not all that different from Walmart taking shelf space away from Pepsi and giving it to Coke.
- Financial analyses will continue to eye elements of cost certainty on both sides of the equation.
- The ABA Law Practice Management Section will be the central resource and outlet for a successful lawyer. Okay, that one is a little self-serving.
- I will urge my wife to allow me to consider early retirement, focusing on truly adversarial outlets, like Little League coaching.

If only some of those predictions can come true, I’ll aim for the last two. However, we can only guess. The concept of “no one right answer” is what makes our profession unpredictable and thoroughly enjoyable. LP

Micah Buchdahl (micah@htmlawyers.com), Chair of the ABA Law Practice Management Section, is an attorney and President of HTMLawyers, dedicated to guiding law firms through business development strategies and implementation.

