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How to Improve Internal Collaboration at Your Law Firm

Ruben · Tuesday, March 7th, 2023

The practice of law — even in a firm environment — is typically individualistic. The siloed nature of the practice of law can lead to duplicative work and bottlenecks. One key to making legal work more efficient and profitable is working together as a united front, and the best way to create that front is through [collaboration](#).

In this article, we'll cover the basics of internal collaboration, including why it's important for productivity and your firm's bottom line, how you can use it to retain clients and legal talent, and where legal technology can lend a helping hand.

What is internal collaboration, and why is it important?

At its core, internal collaboration means working as a team. It acknowledges that together we can accomplish more than if we act alone.

Some lawyers think collaboration is antithetical to the practice of law, which they view as inherently competitive. But internal collaboration is an important part of working in any organization and is important if your law firm wants to find new ways to reach its productivity and profitability goals. [Research shows](#) that law firms that get collaboration right earn higher margins, attract more lucrative clients, and inspire greater client loyalty.

Does internal collaboration improve the client experience and profitability of my law firm?

A better-connected law firm means more access to the internal riches of the firm. Your firm is likely full of expertise — experts in litigation, real estate, accounting, and human resources, to name a few. But unless you have collaboration, a lot of that expertise may go untapped.

Lawyers often face complex issues that fall outside of their practice area expertise. If you're a litigator dealing with a benefits issue, knowing how to access and work with your employment and benefits team is important to providing the best client service. If you practice in family law, when it comes to alimony across state lines, you might require some assistance from a colleague with tax expertise or before a different jurisdiction's courts.

Better collaboration means better business, and better business means more business. Frictionless internal collaboration is good for your clients, and it's good for your bottom line.

How does internal collaboration affect firm culture and its ability to attract and retain talent?

A recent [McKinsey study](#) looking at employee retention rates in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic asked employees why they quit their jobs. The top three factors cited were that the employees didn't feel valued by their organizations (54 percent) or their managers (52 percent) and that they didn't feel a sense of belonging at work (51 percent). The third response is particularly important to law firms.

Unpacking the term "belonging" goes beyond compensation and benefits and into something much more human. All employees, regardless of their level, want to feel that their contributions are noted and appreciated by both their leaders and the organization as a whole. Internal collaboration plays a critical role, allowing law firms to build camaraderie by recognizing that everyone has something to offer. [People want to stay where they are seen and appreciated.](#)

Organizational culture is a big part of this too. A law firm culture based on collaboration that prizes collective knowledge is preferable to one where lawyers gatekeep resources and compete with one another. [Creating a great law firm culture](#) starts with an open dialogue of free-flowing ideas and feedback, which are important components of internal collaboration.

Three steps to improving collaboration at your law firm

There's no silver bullet that will improve collaboration today at your law firm. However, if you follow these three steps, you'll develop an environment that encourages collaboration — one where team members work together to accomplish their goals.

1. Foster a culture of collaboration

Law firms can promote a culture that rewards collaboration by setting appropriate expectations and incentivizing teamwork. Firms should create opportunities for cross-department collaboration as often as possible.

One place to start is assigning team members to work on projects outside their usual practice area. Or you could create a cross-functional team to tackle a challenge a client is facing, to address lawyer recruitment, or to devise new business development ideas. Simple team-building activities, such as coffee breaks, lunches, and other social events, can also build bonds between people who wouldn't otherwise interact.

Whichever avenue you choose, be sure to recognize and reward collaborative efforts. You may also want to incentivize collaboration by including it as a metric in your firm's yearly evaluations.

2. Encourage open communication

Communication is the foundation for effective collaboration. Start encouraging open communication by creating an environment where team members feel comfortable sharing their ideas, concerns, and feedback. To build a more collaborative environment, schedule regular gatherings, including team meetings and brainstorming sessions.

If your lawyers and staff are willing, you can also bring in outside experts to help develop collaboration and teamwork skills, including communication and conflict resolution.

3. Use collaborative technology and tools

Technology is a powerful enabler of internal collaboration. Legal technology helps teams build a collective knowledge base that everyone can access. In turn, this improves work quality, avoids duplicative efforts, and accelerates results.

For instance, a [fully integrated matter management system](#) corrals data and documents in a single source of truth. It can keep everyone on a team or in a firm up to date on matter status and highlight roadblocks where someone may be able to offer their expertise. With a matter management system, teams can [collaborate in real-time](#) and track matter status, no matter where

they are in the world. And lawyers can exchange messages seeking help from each other, such as whether anyone has experience dealing with a novel legal issue or has appeared before a particular judge.

Cloud-based document management systems also make it easy for multiple people to work simultaneously on documents, accelerating your results. You can also avoid the lag time of waiting for people to turn drafts around or trying to figure out which version is the most recent, both of which can discourage teamwork.

Take the next steps toward collaboration

Law firms can start improving their service delivery — and [their bottom line](#) — by taking steps now to remove the barriers to collaboration. To learn more about how technology can make it easier for your legal team to get work done, [get in touch](#).

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