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It's time to reimagine the practice of law

By Paul T. Llewellyn



Growing up in England, Thursday evenings were the highlight of my week. That was the night that I got to sit down and watch *L.A. Law*, the TV show that followed the lawyers at the fictitious law firm of McKenzie, Brackman, Chaney and Kuzak. The firm had a variety of lawyers: the partner who only cared about the bottom line, the idealistic young lawyer, the criminal lawyer, and the family lawyer. In reality, of course, very few law firms have every type of lawyer, but this was the utopia that was *L.A. Law*. Each episode allowed me to follow a case from beginning to end, often touching on several contemporary issues along the way.

I was ten years old in the mid-1980s when *L.A. Law* first aired,

and despite the fact that the show dealt with heavy issues, it glamorized the practice of law in my eyes. I learned that law could be a noble profession, where lawyers worked with passion and conviction to do the best they could for their clients. The show had such an influence on me that I announced to my mother I wanted to grow up to be a litigator in California.

Now, years later, I am living that life. Happily, I found out that the profession of law is just as exciting as that ten-year-old back in England thought it would be. In fact, real courtrooms often come with more drama than the ones you see on television. I've been fortunate to represent truly remarkable individuals and companies, and knowing that I'm helping them successfully

navigate the legal system is, in many ways, its own reward.

But while it might be as exciting, it isn't always as glamorous or fulfilling as it seems on TV. For a variety of reasons, the profession is filled with dissatisfaction on the part of everyone involved, whether that's lawyers and judges or clients and the public at large. In many ways, the system is broken. We've gone from a fictional utopia to a sorry state of affairs. The good news is that there are a lot of incredibly smart, dedicated people in the legal field. Most people enter the profession with a sincere desire to serve the public. But somehow, somewhere along the way, that desire gets lost. Why does this happen? How can we do better as a profession? And in turn, how can we restore the trust and confidence of both clients and the public in our profession?

With so much negativity aimed at lawyers, is it any wonder that the actual job of being an attorney is not seen as satisfying? This profession teaches that terrible things happen to good people for no reason. The pressures can be immense and the hours long. The same realities of the profession that turn off the public can also work to erode the morale of even the most idealistic among us.

But we don't just have to accept the status quo. From how we train lawyers, to how we market ourselves, to how we treat each other, the legal system is long overdue for a massive wake up call.

As just one example, too many

would-be attorneys enter law school thinking that we sit around all day, discussing the finer points of a Supreme Court decision and analyzing the opinions issued by the Justices. Part of being a successful lawyer is recognizing that you are in the business of doing business. We may have entered the legal world because of lofty ideals, but the reality is that we will only stay in this profession so long as we acknowledge the financial aspect of it. Firms depend upon a constant stream of satisfied clients, but few law schools acknowledge this reality in their curricula. We ought to be teaching law students how to generate and maintain business, including how best to service clients.

One aspect of the English system that I believe the American system should emulate is the



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way that new lawyers are paired with more experienced members of their profession to observe and learn the details of practicing law. Known as a pupillage or a training contract--depending on which branch of the English legal profession a student chooses--it is a mandatory one or two-year training program where a prospective lawyer learns the practical realities of being a lawyer. Imagine leaving medical school and then immediately

performing surgery on a patient. Yet someone can pass the bar, never having practiced law a day in their life, and immediately open a firm and service clients. The training of lawyers is just one of many areas where the legal profession is due for a complete overhaul.

I joke that I would love to see "Love Your Lawyer Day" become a national holiday. I've yet to receive a card or a gift acknow-

ledging the day, but I also haven't given up hope. While it may sound idealistic, I believe that the public wants to root for us. We just need to give them the opportunity.

How many of us dread Monday mornings, celebrate the weekends, and work on autopilot for a paycheck? If you consider that an average workday is eight hours long--and that number is a lot higher if you are a lawyer-- how

many hours of our lives are being spent "switched off," plodding along and accepting mediocrity? If you fight for excellence, however, for work that fulfills you and gives you genuine joy because the field respects and supports you, then these hours invigorate you. They give you more energy to spend on your family, friends, and community. Ultimately, reimagining the practice of law will benefit us all as a profession and the public at large.