

Modern Lawyer

Ideas for Legal Leaders

Editor: Alex Davies

July 2025 www.globelawandbusiness.com



Featured in this issue

The quiet unraveling – law firm cultures at risk

People-first succession – how law firms build sustainable leadership

Why legal wellbeing isn't just wellbeing

Select all squares with
Human

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**I am not
a robot:
maintaining
the human
touch**





First, an apology. If you're reading this issue of *Modern Lawyer* from your summer holiday deckchair, be warned that it's perhaps not the most cheerful collection of articles. The themes in this quarter's edition range from overwhelm, burnout, and fatigue to, as one commentator describes it, "the quiet unravelling of law firm culture". In her first article for *Modern Lawyer*, Dr Bonny Forrest reports how the "cultural glue is no longer holding as it once did" in the face of hybrid work, the impact of AI, high turnover of partners jumping ship, and even government intervention in law firms' activities.

So, what's causing this problem? Are we losing the human touch?

The lawyer-client relationship has always been profoundly human.

Lawyers were traditionally retained as trusted advisors, there to step in when a firm or individual had a business issue that required a legal solution. Law firms were trusted to make a judgment based on their experience, expertise, and (often) long-held knowledge of the client's business, built up over many years.

Perhaps this is the root of the problem. With AI giving us instant answers, we've rapidly become used to our problems being solved right away, by a somewhat generic but cheap – even free – solution. Gone is the green curtain separating Wizard from Oz, and clients are demanding more, because they too are under pressure. "Why are we paying you all this money when I can get the same answer from AI?" they ask. "Can't you get AI to do that?"

It's no wonder that lawyers are having to justify their existence, their time, their hours – even proving that they are indeed human – which in turn leads to stress, burnout, and the feeling that the pace of change is becoming unsustainable.

As reported by Susan Heaton-Wright in her article on communication overload, a 2025 *Law Gazette* survey shows that UK lawyers spend over half their time managing information, rather than using it productively. Excessive communication contributes to increased stress, lower productivity, and strained workplace relationships – and that's before the ever-looming threat of AI is taken into account.

During the course of putting together this issue, one of our contributors asked me if I was worried that our house style use of the en dash – this for those not familiar – might have to change for fear of being accused of using AI-generated text. Its ubiquitous (and telltale) use of the em dash—this for those at the back who haven't yet used an LLM—has become synonymous with "AI slop", and people are increasingly at pains to point out that their work is original, their own, and eminently human. It's little surprise that we're all stressed, when the tool that is supposed to be helping us deal with overwhelm, busyness, and burnout has become yet another thing to worry over.

But let us not get too despondent. Before you fold up your deckchair, turn your Out Of Office off and try to make up the time that your AI counterpart hasn't spent lounging on a beach, take comfort from the words of Andrew White, in our final article.

"AI builds knowledge, but human touch builds wisdom," he says. "And it's wisdom that builds character and deepens trust among people. In the professional arena, law firms and their clients need human touch in their relationships, more than ever."

Enjoy the summer.

Alex Davies

Editor

Editor

Alex Davies

Editorial board

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Charles Martin

Stephen Mayson

Rebecca Normand-Hochman

Aline Poncelet

Kenny Robertson

Bjarne Tellmann

Globe Law and Business contacts

Sian O'Neill, Managing Director

sian@globelawandbusiness.com

Nicola Hornsby, Marketing Manager

nicola@globelawandbusiness.com

To contribute

The Editor and Globe Law and Business welcome new contributions.

Proposals for new articles/

material should be submitted to

Alex Davies at

Alex@globelawandbusiness.com

Citation

This journal should be cited as

MLP Vol 9 [2025]

To subscribe contact

glo@globelawandbusiness.com

Annual subscription

Digital £375/\$595/€485

Contact

glo@globelawandbusiness.com

for multi-user options

Modern Lawyer is published by

Globe Law and Business Ltd

3 Mylor Close, Horsell, Woking

Surrey GU21 4DD

Tel: +44 20 3745 4770

The idea for this journal arose from the 'Business of Law' series of books, which is co-published with the International Bar Association. The journal is complementary to the book series, and the publishers gratefully acknowledge the support of the IBA.

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ISSN 2634-548X



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