

Modern Lawyer

Ideas for Legal Leaders

Editor: Alex Davies

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How should law firms respond to the DEI purge? Try BAU

Leveraging the optimistic change model to bolster your AI strategy

“Imagineering” a fairer future





“Imagineering” a fairer future

I was particularly struck by a concept introduced in one of the articles in this quarter’s edition of *Modern Lawyer* – that of “*imagineering*”. Anna Marra discusses Walt Disney’s “three chairs” method for bringing big ideas to life (see p.6), and how this approach can be applied to legal project management – or really, any ambitious undertaking. I happened to read Anna’s piece just as headlines began to break about the dismantling of DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) initiatives in the US. Lisa Unwin tackles this topic on p.23.

What if DEI – or more broadly, the pursuit of equity – were approached through the lens of the three chairs? For those unfamiliar, the method involves adopting three distinct mindsets:

- The Dreamer: where you envision the ideal future.
- The Realist: where you map out a practical plan.
- The Critic: where you interrogate assumptions and anticipate challenges.

Sitting in the Dreamer’s chair, you might picture a legal profession that is truly equitable – where people of every background and identity are not only welcomed into the profession but supported in thriving, on their own terms. A profession shaped by multiplicity, not homogeneity. Sounds good, right?

From there, the Realist takes over. What needs to change to bring this vision closer to reality? Attitudes, yes. But also structures. Access to education. Mentorship. Funding. Recruitment and retention practices. Cultural norms inside firms. What levers can be pulled and which systems need a fundamental redesign?

Then comes the Critic. And this role is essential – especially now. This is where we must rigorously test our assumptions. Is a diverse profession genuinely desired by those in power? What are the risks of performative or poorly designed initiatives? How do we measure impact without reducing people to metrics? And above all, how do we stay accountable to the values we claim to uphold?

It may seem simplistic to apply a storytelling model to an issue as complex – and contentious – as DEI. And of course, diversity isn’t a “problem” to be “solved”. But perhaps precisely because the debate has become so fraught, we need new ways to think, speak, and act constructively.

The three chairs offer a framework not just for dreaming of change, but for designing and defending it. If we truly want to build a fairer profession – and a more just society – we must imagine it boldly, plan it carefully, and critique it honestly.

That’s *imagineering* at its most powerful.

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Contents

Volume 9, Issue 1, April 2025

2

**Difficult conversations –
the danger of not having
them and how to start**

By Joanna Gaudoin

6

**Imagineering – legal
project management
lessons from Walt Disney**

By Anna Marra

11

**From logic to instinct –
how decision-making
styles shape law firm
success**

By Iryna Nikitina

23

**How should law firms
respond to the DEI purge?
Try BAU**

By Lisa Unwin

26

**Leveraging the optimistic
change model to bolster
your AI strategy**

By Nikki Shaver

34

**Overcoming self-doubt –
the power of thoughtful
awareness**

By Helen Tuddenham

40

**Breaking the cycle –
combating decision fatigue
and burnout in law**

By Nika Kabiri, JD PhD

48

**Embracing the digital
associate – transforming
law firm strategy and
leadership in the AI era**

By James Grice

52

**Managing cultural
differences in global
legal teams**

By Naïs Mouret

59

**From lavish dinner to
personalized seminar –
fresh thinking on client
business development**

By Andrew White

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