

Avoiding the Great Gen AI Wrecking Ball: Ignore AI's Transformative Power at Your Own Risk

By Catherine Kemnitz

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Tech innovations are always disruptive to a greater or lesser extent—think about the PC, Microsoft Word, the internet, the iPhone, all revolutions in their day—yet nothing compares to what we're experiencing now with artificial intelligence (AI).

I think of it as the "gen AI wrecking ball," a force that's fundamentally different from past disruptive technologies in reshaping how we operate and how legal work gets done. Unlike past legal tech innovations, the generative AI wrecking ball actually presents an existential threat to legal organizations that don't get their AI act together sooner rather than later.

Our industry has historically struggled with technology adoption, maintaining a certain defensiveness about the specialty and sacredness of our profession. That resistance now comes at a cost. While other industries have progressively adopted (or even rushed into the arms of) new technologies and established clear metrics for measuring their value, legal hasn't.

The emergence of OpenAI's ChatGPT and Anthropic's Claude, and now, a flood of legal-optimized or specialized LLMs and AIs (such as DraftPilot, Harvey, Leya and others) has created a moment of reckoning. We can no longer look the other way or bury our heads in the sand. The transformation of legal practice isn't "coming soon." It's here, it's now, it's unavoidable, and it's either the greatest threat to or the greatest opportunity for your organization's very existence. You get to decide.

A New Generation of Legal Pros

The most striking change I'm seeing is in how younger generations of lawyers and other legal professionals approach their legal work today. Newly or recently minted lawyers and lateral hires simply won't join organizations that haven't embraced next-



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Catherine Kemnitz of Axiom Global.

generation technology. Why would they? They've grown up with advanced productivity, research, project and data management, communication, documentation, organization, and other tools. They expect and want to use them in their professional lives.

Let's talk about accuracy, and let's be honest about our baseline. When people raise concerns about AI accuracy, I ask: "What are you comparing it to?" Having seen countless due diligence reviews by first-year associates in large law firms, I can tell you we're not starting from a baseline of 100% accuracy. Some might achieve 25% accuracy on a good day. If gen AI technology can consistently deliver 50% accuracy (or better!), that's a significant leap forward.

Now let's talk about productivity. Consider high-yield indentures, traditionally considered sophisticated legal instruments. While they require expertise, much of the work involves mechanical processes—ensuring money flows and protections are properly

structured. I'm a lawyer, not a futurist, but I believe within two years, if not sooner, generative AI will be able to create customized indenture shells within minutes as opposed to days—immediately producing the equivalent of version 15 today. It's not automation—entire work streams will simply disappear.

From Adoption to Absorption

In our client engagements at Axiom, we're seeing self-reported efficiency boosts of 20%, and 20-40% increases in work product quality when using AI for contract review, for example. Other use cases are similarly compelling, and we're exploring them aggressively. This isn't about replacing lawyers. It's about freeing them to focus on the truly creative and strategic aspects of legal work and empowering them to be more effective and efficient.

It's time for the legal industry to shift our thinking from technology adoption to technology absorption. The incoming generation of lawyers and other legal professionals don't "adopt" technology. They absorb it naturally and are drawn to it just as my children are. They don't know any other way of working. And that's exactly as it should be.

This has profound implications for law firms and in-house legal departments. If your organization isn't investing in learning about next-generation tools and processes, and budgeting for what might (and will) come next, you're not just falling behind. You're losing competitive advantage. Ask how can you effectively represent clients whose own operations are technology-driven if you're still operating in the legal Middle Ages, if technology is a "nice to have" as opposed to a mission-critical component of your function?

Surfboards for Change

In my role at Axiom as chief strategy officer, I often tell my team about the importance of having "good sea legs"—that is, the ability to ride the waves of change at a pace that will only continue to accelerate. The future might look blurry now, but that's precisely why we need to be nimble, adaptable, and embrace uncertainty.

Fears and fixed mindsets ("that's how we've always done it") are our biggest enemies in this transformation to a digitally reinvented future of law. Yes, we'll all feel uncertain and even scared at times as we step into the tech-enabled future of legal work. That's natural. But if we let those fears prevent us

from embracing this new world, we won't be able to fight effectively for better outcomes, and we won't be able to avoid the gen AI wrecking ball. We should approach these challenges like a martial arts fighter with control and respect for what's ahead but always ready to engage.

The beautiful thing about this moment is that we're all in the same boat, with the winds of change pushing us into uncharted territory. No legal organization has solid ground beneath them any longer, whether they created that situation or the world created it for them. This universal uncertainty means it's the perfect time to take calculated risks and, using a growth mindset, take your chances with gen AI.

From Threatening to Thrilling

I'm particularly excited about the opportunities for innovation in legal service delivery. As I mentioned earlier, at Axiom, we're seeing how legal technology, including gen AI, can enhance rather than replace human judgment, creating new possibilities for lawyers and clients alike. The key is to remain curious and open to ideas we haven't yet imagined.

What we're experiencing today isn't simply tech disruption. It's an opportunity for the fundamental reinvention of legal practice; a rare opportunity to invest in the power of technology to strengthen the power of lawyers. The winners in this transformation won't be those who resist change, give it lip service, or merely adapt to it. It will be those who actively embrace it and help shape what comes next.

The gen AI wrecking ball is clearing the way for something new. Whether we like it or not, it's coming for us all. Ensure your law firm or in-house team is prepared by running hard and smart to stay ahead of it, to shape it, and to transform it from an existential threat into a competitive weapon that amplifies your team's capacity, efficiency, and impact.

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