Law School's Missed Lessons: Teaching Yourself Legal Tech

By **Alyssa Sones** (June 18, 2025)

While law school teaches everything from civil procedure to stare decisis, there are some aspects of practicing law that aren't covered during the three years that lead up to the bar exam. In this Expert Analysis series, attorneys offer advice on navigating real-world aspects of legal practice that are often overlooked in law school. If there is a professional skill you would like to write about, email expertanalysis@law360.com.

Mark, a first-year litigation associate, receives the following assignment in an email:

> Can you handle the first draft of our motion to compel in this federal case? You can pull the briefing from the client's previous state court case and the last federal motion to compel I filed as examples.

The assignment continues:

> Make sure the motion complies with the court's local rules. If you know how, go ahead and look at the e-discovery database for this case so you can update the numbers in the sample motions on the burden of complying with this discovery request. Let me know if you have questions. — Juliet

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Mark stares at the screen. He excelled in his legal research and writing class. But he has no idea where to find old state court briefs, how to use the firm's document management systems or where to find the court's local rules.

Mark hesitates to bring his questions directly to the partner, feeling they might display a lack of technical competence. And he knows he will not be able to impress Juliet because he cannot begin to imagine how he would use the e-discovery platform to help establish a discovery burden.

Attorneys who join the workforce with these valuable skills have an upper hand.

Lawyers are often surprised how few programs new graduates are familiar with, and they're thrilled when junior team members suggest new technologies to efficiently serve clients in ways the senior lawyer had not considered. Most law schools have significant ground to make up in instilling this technical fluency and an innovative mindset in their students.

Why It Matters

Law firms, clients and courts alike are grappling with how to make the most of emerging AI technologies while maintaining the legal system's integrity. Across the board, the vast majority of these legal industry participants are moving toward greater use of technology.

Law schools that inadequately train students on legal technology set back their students' ability to compete in the modern legal market after graduation.

Employers and courts expect competence.

The 2024 Law School Preparedness Survey by Bloomberg Law found that 62% of attorneys felt law school graduates should be familiar with legal technologies before they begin practicing.[1] The American Bar Association's Model Rules of Professional Conduct, state ethics rules, and many courts and clients demand that attorneys maintain a level of technical competency.

At the same time, practicing attorneys are struggling to stay abreast of technological advances. Employers want new hires to bring technological competence on day one.

Clients want value.

Recent legal technology advances have streamlined the entry-level work that has long been thought of as a training ground for new lawyers. Clients are frequently tech-savvy companies that expect their partners to innovate by trying new tools that might streamline their legal workflows and matter management.

The emergence of generative artificial intelligence that appears — rightly or wrongly — to be able to do a lot of the work historically done by junior attorneys has forced a reckoning within the industry about how best to provide legal services. As a result, companies with historically large legal budgets are reevaluating the value their law firm partners provide.

Students need the training.

While many law students in 2025 may be digital natives who grew up around advanced technology, that does not mean they have been exposed to the types of tools professionals might expect. Many students lack experience even with the basic word processing tools used by most law firms because their undergraduate programs used other competing software.

Regularly using popular apps that run on big data does not directly translate into developing the analytical skills that can help junior attorneys stand out, like managing and manipulating large amounts of data.

New Lawyers as Future Innovators

Recent law school graduates must not only know core technical competencies, but they also have a unique opportunity to enter the profession as agents of change. The ability to help a legal team innovate demonstrates an associate's value not only for completing projects in the short term, but also for developing the firm's capabilities in the long term.

Online legal research all but eliminated days spent in law libraries. The COVID-19 pandemic sparked the seemingly permanent transition of an enormous number of court appearances and client meetings to virtual platforms.

Now, sensationalist views abound on whether, and to what degree, rapidly changing legal technology offerings will affect the need for lawyers in the future. But it is widely accepted that further technological advances will alter the day-to-day practice of law in currently unimaginable ways. New lawyers who can help their employers enter new eras of practice will excel.

Turning back to the hypothetical scenario, Juliet would be pleased if Mark tackled the technical and legal hurdles in her motion to compel assignment. If he went beyond the request by delivering some useful judicial analytics to help Juliet inform the client of the likelihood of the motion's success, Mark would almost certainly earn a spot on her short list for future work.

How New Lawyers Can Increase Their Technical Competency

New entrants to the legal field have many options for teaching themselves about legal technologies. Here are a few ways budding lawyers can increase their competencies while on the job.

Get comfortable with generative AI.

With generative AI front-of-mind for the legal industry, any lawyer, regardless of seniority, who has not received generative AI training should seek it out.

Lawyers should learn how to effectively prompt AI models, which tools to use for which projects, how to appropriately evaluate AI responses and how to make sure they are not sharing confidential client information with the tools.

Learn your employer's tools well.

If your team relies on the Microsoft Office suite, carve out some time to learn the intermediate and advanced features available in it. Knowing how to properly format legal documents in Word or use basic formulas in Excel will help you turn in professional-looking work product and avoid unintentional missteps.

Ask about and learn how to use your employer's preferred tools within other common categories like document review, due diligence, court access, project or case management, document repositories, and client communications.

Ask those you work with what other tools are frequently used in practice and if they have recommendations for learning to use them. If you are at a firm with training materials, see if there are existing materials on your firm's specific tools that can get you up to speed.

When you receive an assignment, ask up front where to find any documents or information you might need. Most tools have tutorials and guides just a quick search away that can teach you the basics of those platforms if you are not yet familiar with them.

Consider exploring the frontier of legal technology.

Those who are interested in practicing law in an innovative way should experiment with the thousands of tools available in the market. Some tools already used by many firms offer advanced capabilities for document automation, shortcuts to reuse legal clauses when drafting legal documents and options to conduct legal research directly within your draft documents.

You can learn more about trends in the legal tech industry by subscribing to newsletters that keep you informed about emerging tools and how to get the most out of your existing technology suite.

Connect with your employer's practice technology experts to find out which tools available to you are the most valuable but underutilized. If your firm's experts are excited about new capabilities coming in the future, you may be able to test those products within your team to keep your practice at the cutting edge.

Turn an AI bot into your educational tutor.

Ask your AI tool the questions that may sound dumb to get a baseline understanding that you can build from. Have the AI tutor help you learn about what technical skills are widely used by attorneys in the practice area you intend to pursue.

Take it even further by asking the tool to help you make a personalized legal tech competency learning plan based on your practice area, type of employer and other factors unique to you.

What Law Students Can Do

Current law students should take the initiative while still in school to learn about the technology tools they are likely to encounter in practice. When choosing a clinical law course, look for courses that ask students to complete a variety of projects that might actually be assigned to a junior attorney in the relevant practice area.

Take note of the technologies and projects you work on to build a portfolio of skills you can share with potential employers. Take advantage of legal practice exposure through internship opportunities to gain familiarity with a variety of workflows. Whenever possible, ask internship employers what technologies they use for things like case management, e-discovery or due diligence.

Conclusion

Rapid advancements in technology pose both risks and opportunities across the legal industry. New lawyers should be intentional when learning the technologies available to them in today's legal market, and recognize that mastering the technical aspects of the profession can open doors.

As the influx of generative AI into the legal market has caused every legal industry participant to reconsider how they operate, today is a great time to revisit lawyers' technical competencies and capacity for innovation from all angles.

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[1] https://pro.bloomberglaw.com/insights/law-school/law-school-preparedness-survey/.