

Professional Legal Management WeekSM: October 6-10, 2008

Twelve organizations join forces to celebrate the evolution of the global legal management profession.

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ONLINE
EXCLUSIVE!



As Bob Dylan once said – The Times They are a Changin’ – and for today’s legal management professionals that is very good news. For many years the “support personnel” that worked in the legal management profession were looked upon as individuals who merely handled those pesky little details behind the scenes that no one else wanted anything to do with, much less cared about. But in today’s modern law firm or corporate legal department, those same men and women are the very backbone of the legal profession.

You have come to be recognized as the true professionals that you are. And, in today’s fast paced and competitive environment, a law firm would be hard pressed to be successful without you.

Entering the fourth year of Professional Legal Management WeekSM (PLMW), we have an extraordinary opportunity to once again reflect and take stock in the progress that has been made over the preceding years and look forward at what still needs to be accomplished. While it is true that we are experiencing dramatic success in educating the various stakeholders about the true meaning of PLMW and the legal management profession, it is also a time to recognize and understand that this education is, indeed, an evolutionary process. This is not a time to sit back and be satisfied with the success we have made. It is a time to surge forward and build upon the foundation that has been laid and plan for the future.

Held each year during the first full week of October, PLMW is an ongoing endeavor to inform those within the profession, as well as others, what legal management professionals do on a daily basis on their behalf. On several occasions, when speaking with wide and diverse groups, I have been asked if PLMW isn’t just another “Hallmark Holiday.” In fact, just the opposite is true. To clarify for those that may be operating on this misconception, PLMW is *not* a mutual admiration society wherein we “pat each other on the back,” send out for pizza to celebrate our achievements and tell each other how great we are.

While some may think that having a Professional Legal Management Week is a revolutionary concept, it is actually something that all members of the legal management profession have been struggling with, to some degree, for years – creating a better understanding of

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the *professional* natures of the jobs you do to ensure success in your firms. With regard to PLMW, we have planted the seeds, cultivated the soil, and nurtured the plants, but there is still much more to do before the tree bears fruit.

THE PAST IS PROLOGUE

To emphasize how the entire legal management profession is evolving, all one needs to do is look back just over the past year. As you take stock and realize the multitude of factors that are having an impact on the way law firms and legal departments currently operate, you have a more clearly defined understanding of how important your role is to the success of the firm. The challenging business climate is one of the most prevalent economic factors having an effect on the world’s business, and legal, community. As we look forward, it is important that we reflect not only on how far members of the Association of Legal Administrators (ALA) have come in terms of their



being recognized as true professionals within the legal community, but also on how the entire legal industry continues to change and evolve. As the world evolves around us, we must stay the course and remain vigilant, with a keen eye toward the future in our recognition of how others perceive what individuals do within firms or corporate legal departments.

Keeping true to the meaning of PLMW, you must also realize that the evolution in legal management centers not so much on you as an individual, but rather on how you as an individual is perceived within the frameworks of those you work with, and within the business community in general. To help cultivate a positive, professional image for those in the legal management profession, ALA and eleven partnering organizations have taken the lead to help foster and promote the PLMW concept.

In law firms, corporate legal departments, and other legal organizations, effective management takes broad knowledge and expertise. It requires diverse skills and

abilities, dedication, hard work, patience, and perseverance. And management in legal organizations is uniquely impacted by the fact that the practice of law is a service profession where, in addition to all the standard challenges, business decisions and management must mesh with service to clients, high degrees of accountability, public trust, and an intellectually charged and demanding environment.

THE KEY COMPONENTS

Success in business, including the practice and business of law, can be characterized in many ways and contexts. Ultimately, success is the result of good management in action. Good management is professional management, and PLMW is all about the importance of that concept to success in the business of law.

PLMW is centered on awareness, understanding, education, and recognition. It is about “moving forward” and conveying what you, as men and women in the legal management profession around the world, do every day. It is an opportunity for education and for increasing management’s awareness and understanding of everyone in the organization. Among other things, this special week can be an impetus for better in-firm education about how your organization or legal department operates.

As you may have noticed, recognition was placed last in the hierarchy of importance as it pertains to PLMW. It was done so for a reason. This is to emphasize that while you as an individual are important, it is the “collective” where the emphasis is rightly placed. With that being said, PLMW does provide a mechanism for recognizing those in legal management for what they do and the roles they play in their organizations’ successes, and in their service to clients and others in their organizations. “Man” is the principal syllable in “management,” and PLMW is in part tied to recognition of the human side of business success.

Another key component in PLMW’s progression is its focus on “Professional” – both in the sense of something done well and at high levels, and in the sense of a career commitment by those in legal management. That is sometimes overlooked, but the level of commitment is no less than that made by lawyers in practicing law and being advisers, counselors and advocates; it is present in

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those who are planners and designers, analysts and decision makers, managers and administrators, and supervisors and implementers.

A WAYS TO GO

Who are the legal management professionals? You are! Even though a great deal of progress has been made, there is still much to be done to change the perception of who you really are and what you really do. One of PLMW's primary goals is to facilitate awareness and understanding that multiple individuals, all with different skill sets, are integral and indispensable components of a law firm's professional management team.

As such, part of PLMW's ongoing mission is to convey that law firm management is *not* confined or restricted to administrators or ALA members. Its focus is on professional legal management and on *everyone* on a management team who contributes to an organization's success – including managing partners, principal administrators, chief operating officers, and management specialists in areas such as marketing, human resources, information systems and technology, legal recruiting, library administration, and paralegal management. In addition to being ALA members, many of those with careers in those areas are also members of specialty law-related organizations. Eleven of these organizations (see sidebar) join us as sponsoring PLMW partners, and the legal vendor community offers vital support as well.

about the author



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This year's enhanced issue of *Professional Legal Management Week Magazine* strives to build upon the foundation that has been carefully laid over the past several years, and continue to promote PLMW's goals of awareness, understanding, education, and recognition of the entire legal management profession. I invite you to read the many interesting articles in this magazine – available in the print edition and on the official PLMW Web site, www.plmw.org – and find ideas you can use in your firm or organization to carry out these goals and show pride in the role you play in the evolving legal management profession. ♦

Exclusive Content – in Print and Online

The official Professional Legal Management Week Web site – www.plmw.org – contains digital versions of all of the content featured in the print magazine, plus much more from and about this year's 12 partnering organizations:

Association of Legal Administrators

American Bar Association Law Practice Management Section

British Columbia Legal Management Association

Centro de Estudos de Administração de Escritórios de Advocacia (CEAE)

International Legal Technology Association

National Association for Law Placement

International Paralegal Management Association

Legal Marketing Association

American Association of Law Libraries

Managing Partners' Forum

Australian Legal Practice Management Association

The Law Office Management Association