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Change Of Heart: How Attorneys Can Get Buy-In For Big Ideas

By **Michele Gorman**

Law360, New York (February 5, 2020, 6:21 PM EST) -- Leaders of firms and legal departments who are in the trenches of adopting new technologies and business structures should start small and build on progressive victories instead of trying to solve the overarching problems all at once, a group of lawyers said Wednesday.

During a session at ALM's Legalweek Conference in New York City, four panelists discussed tactics for getting buy-in from partners and staff on changes ranging from new technologies to processes.

"If you can set smaller goals, you can have quicker wins, you can build on those wins, you can feel more successful," said panelist Ari Kaplan, founder of Ari Kaplan Advisors, adding that the vision "should be something you can actually see very closely."

From a change management perspective, he said lawyers aren't defining their goals at the core level. To make his point, Kaplan took an informal poll of the audience, asking whose business has stated what "innovation" means for their specific organization. One person raised a hand.

"When I ask you about artificial intelligence, you say ... 'It's never going to work,'" he said. "But if I said, 'If I could provide you with a tiny kernel of software that will pull out all of the particular provisions from a contract ... you'd think, 'Oh, that would be really helpful.'"

Another tactic the panel discussed is considering "WIIFM" — What's In It For Me? — a question that any lawyer facing change might wonder.

Bill Garcia, chief practice innovation officer at Thompson Hine LLP, encouraged the lawyers attending the session to find the forward-thinkers in their firms or on their in-house teams and hold them up as examples.

At the macro level, clients demand firms fundamentally change the way they deliver services. In response, Thompson Hine created a model **called SmartPaTH**, which aligns its legal service delivery with client needs, beginning with a detailed discussion and goal alignment at the outset of every engagement and then a disciplined approach to project budgeting, tracking and communication.

"Your change management does need to be formal and planned," Garcia said. "If it is haphazard, you will not get the results that you want."

Panelist Michele DeStefano, founder of education community LawWithoutWalls and a professor at the University of Miami School of Law, recognized there isn't an easy fix to making mindset and behavioral changes. She encouraged leaders to take baby steps to get lawyers interested and to reach their "aha!" moments, sharing the so-called bonfire approach that uses small groups to effectuate change.

The "idea about bonfires is they leave off a smell and you see the smoke and it's a gathering of people, and so other people want to come and join and get the warmth," she said. "The idea is if you start really small with one group, then other groups [are] looking and seeing, then another group wants to do it, then another group."

Former Orrick Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP Chairman and CEO Ralph Baxter was also on the panel.

--Editing by Michael Watanabe.

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