



The 10 astonishing mistakes lawyers make

As a leading global expert in Legal Project Management, I have worked with thousands of lawyers over the last decade and I continue to be surprised by these simple errors of judgment - all of which are easily avoidable through the application of Legal Project Management disciplines and tools.

And to be completely honest, the worst mistake of all is actually....

Writing off thousands of dollars rather than talking to a client about variations!!!

Lawyers are really intelligent, so it is surprising to see them make the same mistakes over and over again. These mistakes arise from a lack of knowledge about how Legal Project Management frameworks and disciplines can avoid or reduce ALL of these surprising mistakes and especially the worst mistake of all! LPM provides the foundation for correct and complete matter scoping that drives accurate scheduling and costing. After these baselines are established, the formal processes of Monitoring and Controlling and Variation Management kick in to clearly communicate changes to clients and provide visibility to clients before changes are undertaken.

So what are the 10 mistakes and how can you avoid them?

1. **Deliver late and think that it's okay because the team put in a superhuman effort at the last minute!**

This is never okay. The most important thing to your clients is to deliver on their requirements and if they need something by a specified date then they need it then and not a minute later. Legal Project Management provides the tools to properly plan your matters so that you can deliver on time; Legal Portfolio Management provides the framework to allow effective resource allocation so you can juggle your entire portfolio and never miss a milestone or deadline again.

2. **Know that they will miss a deadline and not tell the client until the last minute, afterwards or at all!**

See above, this is never okay. The lawyers who do this are avoiding conflict and a difficult interaction with their clients. If you know this upfront, then it is deceptive not to reveal the true circumstance of the matter – unless you are already planning to use it as a loss leader. If this is not the case and you do it anyway then it is poor practice and all you are doing is avoiding a conflict in order to have a larger conflict later or lose the client. Sufficient scoping and planning upfront using LPM precedents ensures complete transparency and confidence so this never happens again.

3. **Agree to a fixed timeframe without identifying and scheduling ALL the deliverables and activities!**

So unless you can pull off a miracle, then this approach guarantees that you will run late and also go over budget. Using LPM to undertake detailed scheduling using all of the deliverables, along with the underlying activities, ensures that you have a clear view of the schedule and timeframe.

Understanding resource allocation across the legal portfolio and scheduling effectively across all matters ensures on time delivery.

4. **Agree to a fixed cost without clearly documenting scope, assumptions and external factors!**

This works sometimes but not all the time. For simple matters that are undertaken again and again, then an experienced lawyer knows exactly how long it will take and how much it will cost. The embedded experience compensates for the lack of scoping and planning. But when things don't go to plan there is no mechanism to provide visibility to the client nor to discuss variations due to unavoidable external factors. The outcome is an unhappy client or a write off. Needless to say, LPM helps to avoid this situation by providing short cuts for the scoping, scheduling, costing and variation management of matters.

5. **Dismiss the expertise of highly skilled professionals who can accelerate improvements!**

This one really surprises me and it stems from the high intellect that is required to become a lawyer. This means that the concepts are quickly understood and rarely put into practice. An analogy helps to really understand the folly of this approach.

If you want to become a great skier, then you take lessons from an expert; practice on your own; and have the occasional reinforcing lessons.

And even the best skiers on the planet wouldn't dream of competing without a coach!

If you're happy with being just average, then you let your friends take you up the mountain and if you're lucky you have some natural talent. Then you practice on your own and reinforce bad habits from your friends.

That's why lawyers need to engage experts in project management and process improvement if they want to achieve amazing results in record time!

6. **Overlook the benefits of non-legal precedents in maintaining and improving work quality!**

The best law firms rely on knowledge management and excellent precedents to ensure the quality of the legal work, so it is surprising that the same firms have yet to understand the benefits of developing non-legal precedents that will accelerate matter scoping, scheduling and costing, and also greatly improve the accuracy and reliability of these estimates. A simple suite of LPM precedents can take your practice to the next level.

7. **Underestimate the importance of inspiring and leading their legal teams!**

It is amazing that many Partners and Senior Associates don't consider how best to lead and direct their teams to inspire them to do their best work and to meet expectations. Adaptive leadership skills work best and focus on the leader being the coach and playing to the strengths of each team member, as well as supporting them when they are still developing their skills. If your team doesn't perform well it is normally a reflection of poor leadership. LPM has some great techniques that greatly assist with clear communication and delegation to uplift both individual and team performance.

8. **Underestimate the value of clear and regular communication!**

Hmmm, well this one is both surprising and amazing. Effective leaders and effective legal project managers know that communication is critical to matter success. Communication drives the performance of the legal team and it fosters great working relationships with clients. The disciplines and frameworks of LPM mean that much less bad news needs to be communicated.

9. **Assume they know exactly what their clients and stakeholders need!**

Well actually, perhaps this one is even more surprising! The legal challenges of a matter may be completely different to the business challenges. Legal Project Management commences with matter scoping in order to ensure the client's requirements and expectations are clearly understood. Assumptions and external factors are discussed and documented and arrangements put in place for regular status updates and variation management.

10. **Don't know how to maximise their personal productivity - confuse long hours with productivity!**

Research has found that the longer someone works without adequate rest then the less productive they are and the more mistakes they make. Working whilst sleep deprived is similar to working whilst intoxicated. Thorough scoping and planning is a core component of LPM. When done well it provides focus and adequate resources so that long hours are rarely required.

Quote from a client and Managing Partner "We had an unexpected doubling of volume one January and the lawyers who were using LPM sailed through whilst others burnt themselves out."

Legal Project Management is here to stay and yet so many firms and in-house legal teams are struggling to introduce the concepts and very few have been able to change ways of working sufficiently to embed the new approach to legal work. The leading lawyers who are doing it well are delighting their clients, delivering on time and budget, stressing less and achieving a far better work-life balance!

My aim is to inspire you to achieve great things and I look forward to joining you on your journey! Cheers....T

What's Next?

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This article was written by Therese Linton, Founder and Principal Consultant of The BASALT Group® encompassing The Positive Lawyer® and the Academy of Legal Leadership®. She is a global leader in the field of Legal Project Management and literally wrote the book. She also has unique expertise in Legal Process Improvement, Legal Portfolio Management, Legal Transformation and Legal Operations.

Therese and the team at The BASALT Group® are uniquely positioned to work with you to develop Legal Project Management skills and breakthrough the learning curve to achieve genuine mastery at rapid pace. You will stand out from the crowd, wow your clients and get your life back. Our approach goes beyond mere training to provide on-going coaching and legal project management precedent development.

Contact us at www.basaltgroup.global with your area of interest, or questions, and we will lots of useful frameworks, tools and checklists.

In the meantime, if you'd would like to gain more knowledge in Legal Project Management from the World's leading expert, **you can purchase the Legal Project Management Mini-book [HERE](#)**

