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SESSION 2

“LPM: THE NEXT GENERATION CONVERSATION”

“It’s just building those foundational relationships that then when something comes down and they need help with it, you’re their first call, and then you can continue to grow your program from there.”

HOW WOULD YOU EXPLAIN YOUR JOB TO SOMEONE WHO HAS NEVER HEARD OF LEGAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT?

LPMs are there to create a clear channel of communication. They can communicate and build relationships with clients and partners to help understand exactly what can be done for them. With good relationship and communication, there is more efficiency and reduced misunderstandings.

LPMs are there to make things more transparent and streamlined for both the client and partner. As LPM and partner relationships grow, they become a very valuable and integrable part of the process.

“We promote legal project management on the idea that we’re there to enable our lawyers to really focus on the law, and we then pick up the milestone tracking the financials. But also, we’re there to have the difficult conversations with the clients where things have changed, where scope has changed, where assumptions have perhaps varied.”

“Explaining to the attorneys that adding a legal project manager to your team is not an additional cost to the client, but rather a substitution cost where you’re taking the work from very busy associates that they would typically do from a project management’s perspective. So the milestone, tracking the closing checklist, maintenance and monitoring those types of things, and it makes the associates actually happier on the projects because they’re able to focus at their highest skill set in doing the legal work that is required of them.”

“I sometimes poke and prod and ask why are we X percentage over our budgets? And they explain. And I’m all about trying to be as transparent with clients as possible. So at least we are having conversations with them around additional work that we’re taking on for them, the conversations are easier to have rather than after the fact.”

WHAT IS YOUR ELEVATOR PITCH TO LAWYERS/PARTNERS?

“I don’t have an elevator pitch for LPM. I usually literally bounce back the question. I bounce back and say, well, what does it mean to you? What do you think it means? How do you think it helps you? I do this purposely because then you realize I’m actually looking for needs and I’m actually looking for holes in places where we need help.

...A lot of times people respond with budget, which is what you want. A lot of times people respond with billing and a lot of times people respond with, I have no clue, but I really need help, which the best kind of answer, because that means they don’t know what scope is, they don’t know anything else. But there’s a real need.”

THE INTANGIBLES: IMPORTANT SOFT SKILLS

- ✓ RELATIONSHIP BUILDING
- ✓ CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVER
- ✓ COURAGE
- ✓ LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT
- ✓ COMMUNICATION & BASIC PSYCHOLOGY
- ✗ LAW BACKGROUND MAY HELP BUT NOT NECESSARY

WHAT’S THE MOST INTERESTING REQUEST YOU HAVE EVERY WORKED ON AS AN LPM?

LPMs work on different cases day-to-day. Sometimes things arise that have never been encountered in the past. These challenges may require some creative problem-solving which can be very interesting.

“One case had to do with a very well-known person in sports, and how that has all played out. I feel like I can’t say anything at all. I personally found it interesting.”

“Fairly often you get asked to help with clients who don’t really know what they are trying to find. You’ll be sent off to sort of orchestrate this mass document gathering and they don’t even know what they have. And I think to myself, how have people got to this position where nobody knows what they’ve got?”

“...A friend of mine who did legal project management for a consulting firm, and along the line, the client didn’t know how many oil drums they had in a particular factory, and she just looked at them and said, you go out and count them and that did not work out for her.”

THE PURSUIT OF LPM

People in LPM have come from various backgrounds, some from law school with a specialized program in project management and some from a completely different industry. Most LPMs did not purposefully seek out the role, but more or less came upon it ‘naturally’, as in a natural progression into the field.

“I have a theory that people that are in project management are attracted to it because they’re not as organized as they should be, and it sort of pulls them into becoming more organized.”

“When this opportunity came up, I’m a creature of habit, and I wanted to stretch myself. When I heard about a role in a law firm, it was just completely outside my element. I hadn’t even ever thought about a project management group in a law firm before. Never. And even to this day, I tell my friends and people who ask me, really? How does that work? So it was a stretch for myself personally, because I just wanted to grow and have a different sector under my belt for the future.”

WHAT IS MOST FULFILLING BEING AN LPM?

LPM is young and new. What is fulfilling for some is that it is still being ‘built’. The process is still being understood and created, and that can be very fulfilling. Another fulfilling aspect of being an LPM is that you work on something different everyday. Moreover, you get to make important decisions and watch it play out, all the while helping and providing a positive impact on everyone involved.

“...Because it (LPM) was something new and it was in its infancy, and I had been part of something like that before where it was a project management office that we’re kind of trying to get off the ground. I like that being able to actually take shape and build something from the ground up.”

“...You’re working on different things, you’re working with different groups of people. You get to really learn new areas of law. I really enjoy picking out technology that the lawyers could be using and just seeing improvements and efficiencies. It means that people get to go home a little bit. Earlier projects get done on time, and in budget.”

“...The variety, and it depends on which law firm you’re working for because the LPM function is designed so differently within each law firm and what it covers... There’s a sea of opportunity even for a mature program, and it just keeps it very much so an interesting job day to day.”

“Law firms are very starved for business professionals and operations professionals. So there’s really an opportunity to do whatever you think needs doing and change your skill set.”