

Ten Ways to Accelerate Change Efforts

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“The biggest impediment to change [in law firms], identified by 64% of law firm leaders, is that partners resist most change efforts. This factor jumped 20 points from last year’s survey to become the most frequently identified impediment. Only 4% of law firm leaders rated their partners as highly adaptable to change (i.e., rated 9 or 10 on a 0 to 10 scale). Leaders understand the market situation, but bringing their partners along is not easy.”

-- 2016 Law Firms in Transition Survey

What can law firm leaders do?

- 1.** Don’t try to turn the entire ship at once – it’s probably not possible. Instead look for partners who are open to change and willing to experiment and work with them.
- 2.** Seek out partners who have a longer-term outlook and a greater stake in the firm’s 10 to 20 year horizon.
- 3.** Get forward-looking partners into leadership seats – as Practice Group Leaders, Office Managing Partners, Project Leaders and Committee Chairs throughout the firm.
- 4.** Get agreement from partners who don’t want to be actively involved in change initiatives to at least stay out of the way.
- 5.** Listen to your clients and let their input drive innovations in staffing, pricing, and service delivery.
- 6.** Bring together a group of 5 to 10 partners (with appropriate staff support) in an ‘Entrepreneurial Laboratory’ that pursues controlled experimentation. Make sure the group has a clear charter and timeline, an operational budget, compensation protection for the term of the initiative, and full access to firm resources.

- 7.** Be sure that an entrepreneurial group has both the blessing of the full partnership and accountability back to firm. Position their efforts as a low-risk investment that allows the firm to experiment and learn without disrupting the status quo for the majority of partners.
- 8.** Draw on non-lawyer resources in the firm to explore new technology tools, mine existing data in new ways, and develop new metrics to support and measure progress toward change.
- 9.** Rethink traditional compensation systems to include rewards for useful experimentation and successful innovation.
- 10.** Make change profitable. Strive to make entrepreneurial initiatives meet or exceed firmwide profit levels by year three of each project.

About the author

Eric A. Seeger is a principal of legal management consultancy, Altman Weil, Inc. He works with law firms in the areas of strategy formulation and execution, practice group planning and training and organizational issues. He is the co-author of Altman Weil's highly-regarded annual industry survey, *Law Firms in Transition*.

Download a Sample Innovation Committee Charter:

www.altmanweil.com/InnovationCharter

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