Creating a Better Normal For Your Law Firm

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At this time of year, most businesses including law firms are usually starting to plan for the year ahead. The most successful law firms set goals for the upcoming year, draft budgets, and think carefully about how they'll improve both the client experience and firm efficiency. This year, with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic ongoing, that process won't look the same. Still, setting goals and planning to make improvements, even if they're small ones, will help your firm succeed in our uncertain world.

One of my favorite concepts is the idea of the aggregation of marginal gains, most recently popularized by James Clear in his book, *Atomic Habits.* He talks about the story of British cycling coach Dave Brailsford, who took the British Cycling team from one of the worst teams in Europe to the dominating team at the Olympic Games in just five years. How? He looked at everything directly and indirectly related to the performance of his athletes, and found a way to make a small, 1% improvement in each facet of performance. Taken individually, each of these improvements had a negligible impact, but taken together, the improvements delivered an outsized impact: the aggregation of marginal gains. You can apply this powerful concept to your law firm.

Our reality has fundamentally changed, and the future is still unknown. Many of us underwent a tectonic shift in our daily lives earlier this year, and some of us are still finding ways to adapt. No matter where your law firm is today, making small changes will help create a better normal, one that will set you up for success in the long run.

Take the client experience, for example. Our world is now more digital than ever, so creating an exceptional, effortless online experience at every stage of the client journey is critical to your law firm's success. This might look like making small changes to your website to make it easier for new clients to contact you, or making sure intake forms are easy to fill out online. Law firms who focus on a strong online presence and remote client intake experience will be positioned to win in our new reality. I speak more about this in a recent episode of Clio's Daily Matters interview with Gyi Tsakalakis of AttorneySync.

You can look at behind-the-scenes opportunities for 1% gains as well. Maybe you start using a document automation tool to help your staff complete tasks more efficiently. Or maybe you automate follow-ups on unpaid invoices to streamline your collections process.

You could even go beyond 1% gains and add a new practice area or a new service offering to attract a new client base and help your firm thrive. If you go this route, stress test your idea to ensure market viability before investing time, money, and energy into a larger shift. In an e-book recently published by Clio, *Designing Your Law Firm's New Normal,* author and legal industry expert Mike Whelan, Jr. lays out a clear and actionable framework to enable law firms to quickly model and test their innovative ideas to ensure they've got a winning concept, and I highly recommend giving it a read.

The important thing, as always, is to stay relentlessly committed to a client-centered approach. Looking at the myriad tiny ways you can improve both the client experience *and* your law firm's performance will yield success, even if it takes a little longer than expected, and even if you need to recalibrate and take a few detours along the way. Right now, the most successful law firms are the ones taking small steps, looking for incremental gains, and staying committed to carving a path forward in a way that's sustainable for their law firms, clients, and families.

I'll talk more about the idea of the aggregation of marginal gains, and about the 1% improvements successful firms are actually making right now, at this year's virtual ClioCon. This is just one of the many incredible findings we're including in this year's *Legal Trends Report,* and I can't wait to share more with you—I recommend getting your passes to the conference now, so you can hear these insights first hand on October 13.

As your law firm plans for 2022 and beyond, don't rush, and don't overwhelm yourself. You don't have to have it all figured out right now, and the most important thing is to take care of yourself. Even after the current world situation passes, the world will continue to change, and lawyers must continue to adapt. This is a marathon, not a sprint, so consistency is important. Little by little, with persistence and patience, you'll create a better normal for your law firm.

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