

# Building a Client-Centered Law Firm: Jack Newton's Book Calls for a Paradigm Shift

By J. Chad Mitchell and McKay Mitchell

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What if each year 77% of U.S. adults didn't receive medical help for their health issues? Thankfully, adults foregoing health care is not that high (25% of Americans are delaying health care based on a Gallup poll), but every year 77% of U.S. adults

don't receive needed legal help. This is a problem and, as Jack Newton explains in his book, an opportunity.

In *The Client Centered Law Firm*, Newton shows how applying design thinking, sound business principles, and technology can create a new-century law firm focused on improved delivery of legal services. The hope: this approach will lead to greater client and lawyer satisfaction and potentially increase law firms' ability to serve people who currently forego needed legal services.

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Newton is not a lawyer and has never run a law firm, but he has slept in a Holiday Inn. Joking aside, what experience does he have that bears on successfully designing and running a law firm? He co-founded Clio, a cloud-based software used to manage law firms (think smaller firms, not Big Law), and is an “undisputed leader in legal technology.”

Newton spent more than 10 years developing his program, which is used by 150,000 legal professionals in 90 countries. So, instead of running one law firm, Newton built and continues to improve software that runs thousands of law firms. His expertise and experience in understanding law firms, clients, and their needs are shared in his book.

The book has three parts. Part one explores the opportunity for lawyers to run their firm in an Amazon or Starbucks-like way. Today, consumers expect a seamless, convenient experience underlying the services and products they purchase. Most lawyers have not modernized their

practices in this way, thus, the opportunity for client-experience-oriented lawyers to “wow” clients.

As Newton explains, “your ability to distinguish yourself based on work-product is likely limited, but virtually unlimited when it comes to customer experience.” Many consumers’ perception is that hiring a lawyer is too much trouble or is overwhelming (32% and 39%, respectively). In addition, most lawyers have priced themselves out of a large portion of the legal market. The client-centered law firm is a map for those who want to take advantage of these opportunities — and an alarm bell for those who think they do not need to.

Part two explores what a client-centered law firm is. While the revolution to modernize law practice might seem daunting, Newton explains that it is not a matter of becoming the next Mark Zuckerberg but leveraging existing platforms, practices, models, and technology. Newton does not believe that robot lawyers (or any specific technology) will be the defining trait of

successful law firms, but rather that successful law firms will embrace “design thinking.”

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He adds: “Putting your clients at the center of your thinking and running a client-centered law firm empowers you and your firm to be profitable and successful in a world where client experience is paramount.” To achieve the client-centered law firm requires an understanding of client expectations and needs and investing to satisfy those needs. It is not an exercise that you sit down and complete, but a mindset and system to which you make small consistent changes → constant improvement → spectacular output (or, the flywheel).

Part three is the nuts and bolts of developing a client-centered law firm. For those

who want to take the next step, this is the where-the-rubber-hits-the-road part of the book. From a business perspective, there is nothing earth-shattering (e.g., designing for client experience, benchmarking, change management, after-action reviews, cranking the flywheel), but specific application of these principles in the law firm setting is new and intriguing.

Whether you are an old dog or a young pup trying to make your way in the ever-changing legal market full of others trying to take your biscuit, this book is worth the read. Particularly if you are working in a law firm, place students in a law firm, want to start your own law firm, or will work in a law firm one day.

We give this book (with a hat tip to Roger Ebert) two thumbs up for laying out in a detailed way a process for creating a better law firm. If we collectively followed the principles outlined in this book it would elevate the legal profession in the eyes of society. It might even push us closer to providing legal services to more people in a system that in many ways has lost its desire or ability to do so. ■