

3 Ways To Train Junior Lawyers In 30 Minutes Or Less

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Do the junior lawyers you work with need more training?

The answer is probably yes. Today's junior lawyers — classes of 2022-2024 — all experienced the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic during law school. Most trained remotely, or in a hybrid environment, for much of the time they have been employed.

Moreover, according to a survey titled "Beyond Tradition: Gen-Z's Approach to Big Law," released in April by Major Lindsey & Africa, "45% of junior associates feel that law school did not adequately prepare them for their current roles."^[1]

The result is a skills gap that those tasked with raising up the next generation of lawyers are struggling to address. The solutions offered trend in opposing directions, drawing young lawyers to spend more time online, while at the same time requiring them to spend more time collaborating and interacting in the office.

Online microlearning was a hot trend in professional development well before the pandemic — and for good reason. Research suggests that breaking up training content into smaller chunks enhances learning and improves retention by, among other things, reducing cognitive overload.

Today, bite-size, customizable on-demand training from companies like SkillBurst Interactive LLC and Hotshot Legal are a staple of many firms' learning platforms, and growing. Just recently, for instance, legal education company Barbri Global acquired SkillBurst Interactive in an effort to expand its services in professional education.

On the other hand, the importance of in-person contact became more apparent when it was taken away by the global pandemic. Increasingly, law firm leaders want their lawyers talking and interacting to get the benefits of in-person learning and getting to know each other. In-office mandates have put these expectations in writing.

A lesser-known but emerging trend is a fast, effective way to enhance lawyers' performance and drive critical professional skills — live, internal offerings that provide high-impact skill building content and resources in a format

that is focused, brief, bite-sized and interactive.

This programming draws on the same psychological premises of online microlearning, and adapts well to the way Generation Z and millennials are accustomed to learning — think Kahn Academy and YouTube.

It also speaks to the learning styles of some neurodiverse lawyers, which law firms are increasingly attuned to.

What if firms offered microlearning experiences internally, not on a digital platform, but rather in the conference rooms, offices and Zooms that we inhabit? They could deliver high-impact, individualized support and upskilling in an easily digestible framework, served in bite-size portions of 30 minutes or less.

Firms should consider three microlearning formulas. These programs are short bursts — again, 30 minutes or less — just enough time to solve a problem or achieve a goal, woven into regular work life.

1. Microcoaching

In a typical coaching approach, a coach might explore a specific topic that someone wants help with, such as time management, by using inquiry and powerful questions to assess where the person currently is, what the challenges are, what ideas the person could implement and what they would be willing to do differently.

While that can be a powerful and impactful approach, attorneys do not always have the time or the mental and emotional bandwidth for this type of approach — particularly if they are stressed or burnt out. It can also be a challenge if the coach just doesn't have a lot of time with the coachee.

An equally helpful alternative, which we refer to as microcoaching, could be to do a baseline inquiry to see where the coachee is, bring up a PowerPoint or other training materials on the particular topic, do a quick overview of the content, and then bring it back to coaching by seeing what landed and what the coachee is willing to try.

This approach combines both coaching and training while isolating a particular topic.

2. Leadership Labs

Training related to leadership and management is among the most requested program types at many firms, and can be the most difficult to deliver on.

Even though these are vitally important skills in a profession that was built on an apprenticeship model, teaching the professionals that will be the future of your firm can seem like too time-consuming a task to tackle in the midst of client deadlines and the pressure to spend time developing your business.

Teaching leadership skills in short, discussion-based sessions can break down these monumental topics and help busy rainmakers focus on small, simple, and manageable ways to motivate and train the lawyers that they manage.

A “leadership lab” program does just that — it introduces one leadership concept at a time through a short video or article that takes no more than 20 minutes to review. A small group of participants then meets monthly or bimonthly for a guided discussion in which they can explore possibilities to apply that leadership concept in realistic way in their everyday practice.

For example, an article on the importance of building psychological safety can lead to a discussion about how asking an associate for upward feedback can build trust with the associate and result in valuable feedback about one's own leadership style.

3. Speed Learning Sessions

Firms should also consider two additional types of speed-learning programs that offer short bursts of training in 30 minutes or less.

First-year associate substantive training, or FAST, sessions are substantive training modules delivered by senior associates and partners in a practice group to their first-year associates, answering the question, “How do I do this?”

for typical first year assignments.

FAST programs offer practical starting points and instructions including checklists, forms, and other resources.

Speed learning programs are 30-minute facilitated sessions focused on professional skills that are identified by a practice group as needing attention.

At a practice group meeting, partners review industry best practices on the topic and create a checklist that reflects the practices that work best for that practice group.

For example, in a speed learning session on giving, receiving and completing assignments, a practice group might create a checklist that reflects the practices that work best for that practice group's assignment process. The checklists can facilitate better communication and time management, and lead to work product that is more in line with expectations.

CONCLUSION

Junior lawyers need more training. While there is no substitute for on-the-job learning, live, internal offerings that provide high-impact skill building content and resources in a format that is accessible, focused, bite-sized and interactive can go a long way toward enhancing lawyers' substantive and professional skills. What junior lawyer wouldn't want that?

This article was co-authored with Stacey Schwartz, Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP and Lauren Tierney, Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer LLP.

[1] <https://info.mlaglobal.com/beyond-tradition-gen-zs-approach-to-big-law#:~:text=We%20surveyed%20546%20Gen%2DZ%20junior%20associates%2C%2092%20adequately%20prepare%20them%20for%20their%20current%20roles.>

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