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Blog



How to Build a Legal Tech Job

BLOG

Last week, I wrote a post with suggestions about how to *find* a legal tech job but writing it I knew that the “recipe” I put there can’t work for everyone. Some are limited by geography, some lack the necessary experience to make the jump to the job they want, others don’t want to work for someone else, and for yet another group, perhaps the largest of those seeking legal tech gigs, the exact job they want doesn’t exist. So, as a shout-out to those people, here are some thoughts on building a legal tech job when the right one doesn’t readily exist.

- **Make a bet:** I've seen many succeed in making a legal tech job by making a bet. Two examples of this come to mind. Erika Concetta Pagano was a law student was an early participant in LawWithoutWalls (LWOW), an innovative (later ABA-rebel-winning) law school program teaching law students entrepreneurship. Erika, through sheer charisma, passion, doggedness as well as a good intuitive sense that the program she'd just completed was going somewhere, convinced the founder of LWOW, Michele DeStefano, to hire her. Now, more than half a decade later, Erika has created a job for herself at the center of an amazing innovative legal education program. She's Director of Academics and Advancement at LawWithoutWalls and a Lecturer in Law and University of Miami Law School. Yet another example are the founders and leaders of the Legal Hackers organization in New York (Jameson Dempsey, Phil Weiss, and others) whom I've watched rise to the head of a rapidly growing worldwide legal innovation movement. The group has dozens of chapters with a chapter on nearly every continent. While all the leadership remains employed in other areas today, at some point this organization will probably require full time leadership and the current leaders of the Legal Hackers will be ideally suited for the job, or, at the very least well-positioned to lead another similarly situated organization, should they want to do that.
- **Piece the thing together:** In the last few years I've watched Miguel Willis build a legal tech career through hustle and salesmanship. Miguel has started or assisted in starting a number of local and national legal tech projects. Every time I saw him, he was working one angle or another to get to the next legal tech conference or to be a part of the next new legal tech initiative – truly piecing together airfare, sleeping on friends' couches, and whatever else was needed to put himself at the center of legal tech. Many of the contacts Miguel made didn't have a "job" for him, but some offered a small income stream, a contract or part-time gig. He and I had talked a few weeks ago about his plans after his upcoming graduation and he didn't have a job lined up but all of his projects had put him in a place that he had an income that he could get started with. I've seen others do this as well. (Full disclosure, I recently did hear from Miguel that he may have had something more full-time emerging but I

don't think that diminishes my point of piecing something together).

- **Build a law firm:** This next example is Seattle lawyer Forrest Carlson. After the legal tech startup he founded didn't quite pan out, he decided to build a law firm. Not content to build a traditional firm, Forrest and his law partner, John Varga, built the website Washington Wills, a free online library to help residents of Washington State to draft their own wills. Their initial plan was to use the website as a lead generation tool to bring clients into the firm. Last I spoke with the two, the site hasn't worked in exactly that way, but the it did get a fair deal of press and attention in the legal community and, as a result, the two are kept plenty busy with estate planning referrals from other lawyers. Forrest tells me that they still have plans to amp up the SEO on the site but I'm not sure they need to.
- **Start a Legal Tech Company:** A few weeks ago I had dinner with two female legal tech CEOs, Adriana Linares and Nicole Bradick. Adriana runs a training company that teaches lawyers and law firms to use technology and helps them with technology adoption and migrations. Nicole started life as a traditional lawyer but, at least as I've seen it evolve and based on what she told me, quickly found out she was just as good at being a boss and building technology as she is at lawyering. Through a series of deft career moves she's found her way to the head of her a legal tech dev shop that she built, now changing the world leading a team that's building legal tech. I could also easily add Mary Juetten, founder of Traklite and EvolveLaw, onto this list. While both of the companies she's started have done well, Mary's also used them to parlay herself into a highly sought-after legal tech thought leader (and she wrote a book).
- **Intrapreneur the thing:** Finally there's the classic intrapreneur move. Maybe you want a legal tech career but you also happen to like the company you work for. That's fine, you don't have to strike out on your own. David Colarusso is now a Clinical Fellow and Director of the Legal Innovation and Technology Lab at Suffolk University Law School, teaching legal tech. An awesome feat in its own right. More interesting for this discussion is how he talked his previous employer, the Committee for Public Counsel Services, into transitioning him from a staff attorney doing regular attorney work to a data scientist, "[d]eveloping[i]ng and implement[i]ng methods to

better leverage agency data for the benefit of clients” and the general public. I’ve also seen a lot of legal professionals talk their firms or organizations into letting them take up unconventional or new “innovative” roles as “innovation advocates,” “chief innovation officers,” “in-house technologists” and the like. Sometimes, you can build a legal tech job by talking to your boss, making a plan, and making it work.

While I hope the tips here, and in the last post about finding a legal tech job, have been helpful I don’t want to downplay how much of a challenge the transition of finding or building your legal tech job can be. In fact, my next post will talk about why it’s so hard to find or build a legal tech job. At least, one that you really want.

In the meantime, whether you’re looking to build or find a legal tech job, or are just looking for a sweet unique opportunity at the intersection of law and technology please sign up for the Right Brain Law newsletter and join the community of fellow legal freethinkers, here.

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