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Newsroom

'Complacency is the Enemy': Riskin

For the legal profession to thrive, lawyers must "shift their mindsets entirely" to embrace "imperfect change initiatives," the legal management expert said.



PROVIDENCE, September 19, 2014: The legal

profession has never been a *revolutionary* proposition; rather, its nature was always *evolutionary* – changing at a slow, even glacial pace.

Those days, legal consultant and futurist Gerry Riskin warned, are gone forever. “The glacier of the legal profession is now moving so fast you can see it,” he said. To achieve success in this new reality, lawyers must “change their mindset entirely.”

Riskin was addressing a packed-room audience of 125 lawyers, law students and law professors attending Roger Williams University School of Law’s third annual Professor Anthony J. Santoro Business Law Lecture Series, at the Omni Hotel in Providence on Thursday evening.



Riskin, a former partner with one of Canada’s top law firms and a management consultant for the past 20 years, hastened to assure his listeners that he was not hostile toward lawyers or traditional models of law practice. “I’m in love with all of that,” he said.

However, he added, serious changes are needed to adjust to changing market realities. Among other shifts, lawyers' mindsets must move from:

- "Ferociously independent" to visionary and collaborative;
- "Critical and analytical" to creative and open-minded;
- A mentality of crisis management to one of holistic project management; and
- Insistence on perfection to comfort with "trial-and-error" risk-taking.

"The enemy," Riskin said, "is complacency." Lawyers must embrace "imperfect change initiatives" and "tell the world about it. We need to turn the spotlight onto initiative, and leave it on."

Stubbornly clinging to old habits is not an option. "You can't *not* be part of the system in which you live," he said.

Riskin cited numerous examples of technological models – from <http://www.axiomlaw.com/> to <http://www.legalzoom.com> – and developments such as e-discovery and "robots" similar to IBM's Watson that will deprive lawyers of traditional, bread-and-butter sources of hourly billing.

"I'm not making this up!" he exclaimed. "There's disruptive technology, and it's right in front of us."

Other changes inundating the legal profession include the growing acceptance of non-lawyer practice in fields that were once exclusive to J.D. holders. This trend is more advanced in other countries, including Canada, but the United States is catching up fast, Riskin noted.

The way forward, he concluded, is for lawyers and law firms to "keep an eye on change" and focus on "research and development" in finding better ways to serve clients in an evolving marketplace.

Rather than fearing technology's encroachment on traditional sources of revenue, lawyers need to refocus on the skills that only human beings can bring to the table, he said. Smart lawyers will become "curators" -- not trying to compete with electronic data-processing technologies, but using them as tools in navigating the "highly complex, one-off" realities of human and business interaction that no computer could ever fully anticipate.

Riskin is a Canadian lawyer and business school graduate, author, management consultant, and pioneer in the field of professional firm economics and marketing. His books include *The Successful Lawyer: Powerful Strategies for Transforming Your Practice*. He has consulted or presented for private firms and at the request of, among others, the American Bar Association, the Canadian Bar Association, the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA), the Law Society of the UK, the Institute of Law Firm

Management (ILFM), *The Financial Times*, and the National Association of Law Firm Marketing Administrators.

The Professor Anthony J. Santoro Business Law Lecture Series brings leading lawyers and business professionals to RWU Law, presenting on important issues in the field of business law while enriching the school's dynamic learning environment with practical knowledge and valuable networking opportunities. This series is a wonderful tribute to Professor Santoro's distinguished career as a legal educator, a past president of Roger Williams University and the founding dean of Roger Williams University School of Law.