

# Introduction

I'm writing to you as your client. I suspect that no-one did this for you before. If so, it's long overdue.

Although this is a one-to-one conversation, this book is effectively a letter from clients everywhere to the community of lawyers in private practice. It contains a simple but significant request: to practice law the way we actually want it.

You and I want the same thing. You chose this profession to use your expertise, talent, and creativity to solve problems. You find that producing quality work product, which is valued by its recipients, is a rewarding experience. This is precisely what clients like me want when they hire you. This idea of 'talent-driven, client-facing law' is what we both want out of this arrangement. I wrote this book to help you deliver it.

Your reaction to parts of this book may be: "*Now that you put it like that, it's kind of obvious.*" That's entirely the point. These things are so obvious to clients like me that none of us has ever bothered to set them out for our lawyers. Until now.

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# Format

Even though this is written in letter format, I've put in lists and tipsheets. I've also put in some extracts from a program called [Lean Adviser](#), which responds to what I'm asking from you. Some of those extracts are from the core curriculum, and others are taken from the Weekly Lean Briefings, which are viewed by up to 250,000 recipients per month, and contain direct client quotes from leading GCs.

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This book is about us working together, so it's important to understand the personality types involved.

# 1. The Lost Lawyer

Do you ever feel a bit lost? I don't mean lost in your work, in a good way. I mean, you're doing a piece of work, and you're just feeling directionless.

- Why am I being asked to do this?
- What's the point of it?
- How does it fit in?
- Where should I start?
- How should I tackle it?

This is very common and it's not your fault. Maybe you even feel lost on a macro-sense, that the job isn't what you were expecting.

You're not alone. Far from it. The reason you may feel lost is because this is where your career path has taken you. It was always going to happen. You weren't trained to practice law the way your clients want; you haven't been equipped with legal project management skills; and you're ill-prepared to navigate your way through the minefield you work in. So if you feel lost, it's not surprising.

Most of the guidance you've been given came from within your firm, so it's natural that you'd model your game on what you've seen around you in the firm. Again, it's hardly your fault.

Later on, I'll talk about the 8 must-haves of clients like me. But first, did you know that there are 8 habits of lost lawyers? Your journey led you here, and if you have acquired any of these 8 habits, again you're not alone.

The first 4 habits come from your school. These are ways of practicing law the way you were taught at law school, which are designed to please examiners:

1. Read everything
2. Identify every possible legal implication
3. Research all the law
4. Write up a detailed legal analysis

The last 4 more come from your office. These are ways of practicing law the way you've been taught at work, which is designed to please your law firm:

5. Find work
6. Record chargeable time
7. Meet targets
8. Avoid making recommendations

I get it, I see it all the time. But understand that while these things please examiners and law firms, none of them please clients like me. None of these habits solve my problems, mitigate my risk, or get you my repeat business.

There, I said it. If you want repeat business from me or any other client, you need to ditch the 8 habits. Or you can follow the generations along the well-trodden path, but don't be surprised if at times you feel a little lost.

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## 2. The Lean Lawyer

It doesn't have to be like this. You don't have to be a lost lawyer.

There is a better way, and it involves taking everything lost lawyers do and turning it on its head.

Let's go back to law school, where you were taught that "more law is good law." Cite another case, add another layer of analysis, bump that B+ into an A-.

Then came your law firm. Again, "more law is good law." Read everything, examine every issue, leave no stone unturned. More hours, bigger bills, better profits.

That's what you've always been told. More law is better. But now you're working for me on my matter, so you might care to ask how I feel about more law. I'm not a fan. I'm all for more focus, more efficiency, and more value. But what I don't like, and don't want, is more law. Certainly not more law for the sake of it. In my world, less law is good law.

Take the 8 habits of the lost lawyers and turn them upside down. The outcome is amazing:

1. **Read everything?** No, just read everything that matters.
2. **Identify every possible legal implication?** No, just the relevant ones.
3. **Research all the law?** No, don't research any law until it's clear how the law can affect the outcome, if at all.
4. **Write a detailed legal analysis?** No, don't do that or any unsolicited work product. Instead, reflect on my problem and find me effective solutions.
5. **Find work?** No, find waste and eliminate it.

6. **Record chargeable time?** No, not unless it's worthwhile time spent in pursuit of my objectives.
7. **Meet your firm's targets?** I understand the pressures, but I'd rather you focus on meeting my objectives and my expectations.
8. **Avoid making recommendations?** No, don't be afraid to give me recommendations, or at least options. I want actionable business advice, not anodyne legal advice.

This way of working is the ultimate differentiator. It will lead to a much better relationship between us. Our experience will be shared, setbacks will be understood and managed together, empathy will flow both ways, your firm's bills will get paid, my risks will be mitigated and improvements will be captured.

Do this, and you'll become a lean lawyer, not a lost lawyer. Then, as night follows day, you will get my repeat business.

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### 3. The Classic Client

Obviously, there are exceptions and outliers. But even so, GCs and other in-house lawyers have enough common traits that there is such a thing as a classic client. That's me. I am a typical GC, with all that goes with it. I am a classic client, and I speak for all of us.

I wrote this book to help lost lawyers become lean lawyers, which is what classic clients want. This being so, it will help you if you understand the classic client.

You may have this idea that being an in-house lawyer is a pretty cushy gig. Steady hours, no billable hours target, corporate perks. What's not to like?

Allow me to set you straight. Not because I expect you to change anything, but because the better you understand me and my job, the better you can help me.

Like you, my job is much more than just handing out pure legal advice. Like you, I wasn't trained properly for what I'm expected to do. Like you, I'm under-equipped by my employer.

Unlike you, I can't succeed in the sense that you understand it. The best I can do is not fail. This means that a big part of your job is helping me not fail.

In your world, in private practice, success is clearly defined and easily measured. There are plenty of targets and metrics: recorded time, bills delivered, realization rates, originations, pro bono hours, and the rest. Tick the boxes and get the big bucks. It's pretty much linear.

My life is nothing like this. Nobody cares how many hours I put in, I can't win shiny new clients, or send out eye-watering bills. I get thrown into

projects and under buses. I try to be a strategic business asset, I try to mitigate risk, and I try to be the conscience of the company. Sometimes this is perceived as me obstructing progress. I face budget cuts and get told to do more with less.

It's not fair and it's not OK, but I deal with it.

I'm telling you this so you'll understand where I'm coming from. I need you to help me not fail. That means helping me solve problems, navigate obstacles, detect danger, mitigate risk, and get my assignments done without undue drama.

Now that you understand my viewpoint, you can see why I care so much about how you do the work. Now it makes sense to you why I'm so concerned with you being efficient, effective, and transparent.

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Throughout this book, I'll ask you important questions. These issues are rarely discussed, so we'll look at them here. Let's start with the biggest question of all: What's important?

## **4. What Matters Most to You?**

If you're an associate, I'm guessing you have student debt to carry, and ambitions to achieve.

You must be bright and hard working to have got this far, but why choose law? Again, I'm guessing, but you probably like interesting problems and you're hoping to use your knowledge, creativity and intellect to solve them. If that's you, then you'll be a great asset to me.

Having all this talent, having invested so much, and having got this far, my guess is you're hoping to stay in the game for long enough to make it all worthwhile. If so, this book will help you survive, thrive, and stay in the profession for the long haul.

Durability in this profession is all about workflow. Initially partners, later clients like me, will send you work. We will do this for one primary reason: how you do the work. Methods matter. Reputation is everything, and the reputation which will serve you best for your entire career is reliability. I'll get back to that.

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## 5. What Matters Most to Me as Your Client?

I mentioned that throughout this book I've created lists. The most important of these is coming next. It's a list of what matters most to me as your client.

I need your expertise, talent, and creativity to fix my problems. I don't care what you know—that's a given—I care how you do the work. I have 8 must-haves; the things that matter most to me:

- i. Get Me a Good Outcome
- ii. Within Budget
- iii. On Time
- iv. For Value
- v. Service
- vi. Transparency
- vii. Assurance
- viii. A Durable Relationship

The first 4 are tangibles that I will get measured on, and the last 4 are about the journey itself. These 8 must-haves won't change from assignment to assignment or client to client.

How you respond to the 8 must-haves will be key to your survival and long-term success. So, in a later section, you'll find a chapter on each one, to explain what I mean and how you can respond.

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## 6. What Matters Most to Your Law Firm?

You're employed by your law firm and they pay you every month. I get that. Your firm will have told you what they expect of you, and what matters most to them. I get that too. But here's the thing, once we get past all the onboarding, fee-agreement and preliminaries, it's just you and me. In other words—and I need to be very clear about this—when the work starts, you work for me.

I may well like your firm and lots of people in it. I may well respect your firm's brand, its footprint, and reputation. This may well have played a part in the decision-making that led us to work together.

But now we're past all that. When the work starts, I don't really care about your firm's expectations of you; I only care about mine. I can see how this may lead to tensions, or at least put you in a confusing position.

So, allow me to make a suggestion. Once the starting gun goes off, think of it this way: When you're working my assignment, you work at your firm, but you work for me. Your firm is a location, a desk and a keyboard—assuming you go into the office—but when it comes to the day-to-day methods of how you plan and execute each task, I want it done my way.

Now for some reassurance. This isn't [Jerry McGuire](#), and doing things my way won't get you fired. On the contrary, in the big picture, what really matters to your law firm is that your hours are getting monetized, you are operating safely, your work is profitable, and it leads to more repeat business. This book speaks to all those needs.

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This book is about what I want from you as your client, and the Lean Law concept is how to provide it. It's worth spending a few moments to describe this.

## 7. The Concept

I've told you how much your methods matter to me. I've even gone so far as to say that how you plan, execute, and monitor each task is the biggest differentiator. I've said that if you do this my way, the assignment will be successful in all the ways that matter to me. Then I said that by you doing this, I will come to regard you as reliable, which is all I want.

At this point you have a problem for which I have a solution. You were never taught the skills, methods, and techniques to do what I'm now asking from you. At law school, you were taught what the law is, not how to practice it the way clients like me actually want.

You're not alone in this predicament. On the contrary, it has affected every newly minted lawyer since Roman times. Like you, every predecessor had to learn how to practice law while doing it. If you were lucky and got the right mentor, you had a massive head start. If you didn't then life will have been trial and error.

This isn't the only reason why clients like me are unhappy, but it's a big part of it.

I said I have a solution, and I do. A couple of years ago a concept called Lean Law was developed. This was picked up by ALM Media and developed into a solution called Lean Adviser. It is a set of teachable lessons and tools for lawyers in any firm, to equip them to practice law the way clients like me actually want.

Lean Adviser went on to be validated and approved by client in thought-leadership organizations like [Corporate Counsel](#) and [Global Leaders in Law](#).

Lean Adviser doesn't undermine what you bring to my assignment, or replace anything. Your expertise, talent, and creativity will always be your stock-in-trade, and the reason I want you on my team. What it does is give you a playbook to ensure you operate with 'Lean' methods:

- Effectiveness: Achieve my goals
- Efficiency: Without waste or needless drama
- Transparency: No spin, blindsiding, or surprises
- Reliability: Do all of the above, consistently

The result is a game changer. It transforms the way outside counsel like you do my work.

Imagine you and colleagues from your law firm working in harness with me and my folks, on a shared journey, with a common goal and a shared sense of direction. Imagine that unified group being effective, efficient, transparent, and reliable. That is what I want.

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