ALACurrents
LAW FIRM MANAGEMENT TRENDS & INNOVATIONS

Attorneys and Computers: A Love-Hate Relationship

By Dodie Edelstein

The last thing an attorney wants to do is take time away from billable hours to go to a technology training class. Most firms encourage it, but rarely get a good turnout. Your firm may be paying for a qualified instructor, but the attorneys are just not enthused about attending. Instead, they often look for the quickest way out.

There are options available to firms that want to invest in improving the computer skills of their attorneys. Try one-on-one training. Attorneys get their questions answered in the comfort and privacy of their own offices — and the trainer can focus on critical topics, instead of a one-size-fits-all class.

For some firms, such suggestions involve a great deal of change. So what can you do? Encourage attorneys to purge bad habits by streamlining one task per week to make the tool on their desks work for them. Here are some examples of potential improvements:

1. Leverage automation

Take a few minutes and figure it out. If you are doing something over and over again, rest assured, there is a better way. Ask for help. Do not keep clicking buttons — it builds unnecessary stress.

2. Buy a macro package

Most firms have some kind of "macro" package to automate the creation of legal documents. For instance, California courts require a specific set of rules that vary by county. Instead of having to know each court's rules, you can use a macro to automatically provide the correct format. Many believe a macro package is too expensive. If a firm expects to use Microsoft Word right out of the box, it tends to lead down an exasperated path. Consider the cost of a pleading being rejected — somehow the cost no longer seems so high.

3. Deal with emails

Having an overflowing inbox is not a badge of honor. Excessive emails cost your firm money and time in saving, backing up and restoring. Would you keep a trash can full of old junk mail? The rule of any paper or electronic communication is the following: Touch it once and deal with it.

ALA*Currents*
LAW FIRM MANAGEMENT TRENDS & INNOVATIONS

4. Learn to cut, copy and paste

This is not a joke. When pasting into documents, you have options. You can choose to bring the good formatting in and leave the bad out.

5. Hesitate before going rogue

Law firms need stable, reliable products that are not too cutting edge. Innovation is great, but you do not want to be some software company's test case.

6. Accept advice from those in your industry who are more knowledgeable

Listen to your trusted IT team, business partners or consultants. Do not simply go for the closest answer (such as your brother-in-law, because he knows computers). After all, your documents are your business. Make smart decisions about how you treat them.

7. Remember training does not cost — it pays

The bottom line is that being savvy about technology is no longer something you can delegate to others. Every iota of knowledge you can add to your expertise makes you a better lawyer. There are small factors that can improve the way you work and ultimately, improve your firm's bottom line.

Dodie Edelstein is the Director of Training at Innovative Computing Systems, Inc. She has been training lawyers and staff in the use of technology for decades and helps ICS clients become more efficient through the improved use of the applications they employ to serve their clients. She contributes to a LinkedIn group called IT Tips for Legal.