Episode 22: Summary

Episode name: An Unplanned Career in Legal Tech
Guest(s): Wenee Yap

What area(s) of law does this episode consider?	Wenee discusses her unconventional career trajectory right out of law school, her work in the legal tech space, as well as supporting law students and young lawyers.

This episode considers many themes, from starting your career as a lawyer, to making changes throughout and utilising a growth mindset to see opportunity in endeavours that may initially seem daunting. The ray of sunshine that is Wenne Yap will make you laugh, while also prompting you to consider your own career path and views about technology and innovation in the legal profession. |
| **Why is this topic relevant?** | Lawyers spend over 40% of their time at work utilising different types of technology, whether it's for legal research, matter and spend management, time recording or document drafting software. People technology spend is currently about 2% of all legal industry spend across customer facing, in-house and private practice and that number is expected to increase.

There is no doubt that the legal industry is experiencing a time of change that is focused on technological innovation. This shift has promoted many to wonder about the future of the profession. This is true for both lawyers and law students, the former often predicting either doubt around the impact of technology or doom and gloom that such technology will render lawyers redundant, but some lawyers and many law students instead see opportunity for change and improvement. Regardless of where you sit on that spectrum, this episode will prompt you to consider your own mindset and biases toward both your traditional view of legal practice and the role of innovation within the profession. |
| **What are the main points?** | <u>Pessimism</u>

● Lawyers are naturally more pessimistic than non-lawyers. According to a 2005 article published by the Deakin Law Review titled 'Why Lawyers are Unhappy" the qualities that make a good lawyer, one of them being pessimism, don't make for a happy human being. According to the authors, lawyers are selected for their pessimism and law students might even study law because of their own pessimistic tendencies. And that pessimistic outlook is adopted outside of their professional lives too. Pessimism is defined in the article not in the colloquial sense of "seeing the glass as half full or half empty" but rather, the tendency to interpret the causes of negative events in stable, global and internal ways. In other words the pessimist views a negative event as unchangeable, while the optimist sees it as just a temporary set-back. The authors of the article suggest that the challenge for lawyers is remaining prudent professionally, being healthily pessimistic, while being mindful of keeping those pessimistic tendencies away from the domains of our life outside the office.

<u>Legal tech</u>

● There is no 'one size fits all' approach when it comes to implementing and embracing tech in the workplace. What works for one firm, may not work for |

another. It's important to trial and compare new technologies to ensure the software is fit for purpose.

- It is recommended that firms review their workflow processes – talk to colleagues and employees to identify inefficiencies and where certain processes could be improved. From there, start researching a solution that addresses that specific problem – be mindful to identify the problem or issue to ensure you solve the right problem.

- The way in which a piece of legal tech is used for one company may be used differently for yours. Look at ways other industries are using technology and see if this fits with the way you work. Slack (an online chat tool) and Trello (a virtual to do list, and really useful way to keep organised) are two cloud-based products that have traditionally been used by other industries that many law firms embraced during COVID-19 to assist with team communication and workplace efficiencies.

- Make time to research and make improvements. As lawyers, it is easy to put projects, like implementing new tech solutions, on the back-burner in favour of billable work. It's a difficult mindset to crack, but these solutions will ultimately create efficiencies and as a result more time for other tasks so it's important to focus on the improvements you can make today that will create more efficiency in the future.

- Finding the right technological solution is a process. If something doesn't work perfectly to begin with, trial other solutions. Also, get buy-in. Ask your colleagues to trial the options and provide feedback. People are more likely to be less resistant to learning new technology if they have been involved in the decision to implement that product.

Law Students and Recent Graduates

- The Council of Australian Law Deans estimate that there are approximately 7,500 law graduates every year, although some argue that this is a conservative estimate and real number could be much higher. In 2014 the Law Society of NSW released a report about the future prospects of law graduates. That report found that there is anxiety in the legal profession and in law schools about a lock of employment opportunities for law graduates in legal practice. According to Graduate Careers Australia, 74% of Australian law school graduates obtain full-time employment within four months of graduation, which is higher than the national average of 69%.

- It is recommended that law students get involved in university groups or competitions and in the community more broadly.

- The Australian Law Students' Association, also known as ALSA is the national representative body for all law students in Australia and currently totals around 40,000 members. ALSA advocates the interests and concerns of Australian law students, gathers and disseminates information of interest and concerns to Australian law students, facilitates communication and the exchange of information between law student societies and initiates social and intellectual activities among law students at a national level.

| **What are the practical takeaways?** | - Challenge your mindset about the role of technology and innovation in the profession. |

- Be mindful about both conscious and unconscious biases toward the word "innovation". Research has shown that it's not always a popular topic, with some research suggesting that a majority of employees dislike and avoid innovation. The University of Toronto surveyed 1,000 American and Canadian university educated workers to assess their attitudes towards innovation. The scientists conducting the research looked into things like "grit" and "openness to risk". The drive for innovation among participants in the survey varied from 14% to just 28%. And their willingness to take risk sat between 11% and 19%. This research is considered in a HBR article by Nadya Zhexembayeva which suggests to stop calling it "innovation" and select a phrase that captures the concept of continuity and benefit, rather than risk.

- Don't be afraid to experiment with legal tech, and more importantly, make time to research, trial and implement different solutions.

- Involve your colleagues and staff – take feedback and use this information to improve systems and processes.

- The Law Society of New South Wales released its FLIP – or the Future of Law and Innovation in the Profession report in 2017. Law Society members can also log into the portal to access the FLIP podcast, which covers topics such as legal tech, change management, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity and cloud computing.

Show notes

The Deakin Law Review article titled, 'Why Lawyers are Unhappy'

The Law Society's FLIP Portal

The Law Society's FLIP Report

The Australia Law Students' Association

The Harvard Business Review article by Nadya Zhexembayeva titled, 'Stop Calling It "Innovation"

The Action-Learning Cycle: Explained