HOTSHOT

TRAINING LAWYERS FOR THE AGE OF AI

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Introduction: AI is Changing How Lawyers Work. And How Law Firms Train Them.

With AI automating traditional associate tasks and clients expecting faster, tech-enabled solutions, law firms are facing fundamental questions about their business model. One that looms largest is how they'll develop the next generation of lawyers to prepare them for this transformation.

One legal tech blog recently captured this uncertainty: "The questions keep coming up: if GenAI will increasingly be able to do process-level work, what happens to the most junior associates? What work will they do? Who will train them? Do we even need them?"[1]

While these are difficult questions, what's clear is that the associate role is evolving rapidly. Clients will no longer pay for associates to pull all-nighters to review contracts and discovery documents — not when AI can perform these tasks faster, more accurately, and at a fraction of the cost. Associates will need to bring more to the table than this kind of repeatable work that technology can manage and that legal departments will increasingly handle in-house.

These changes are forcing law firms to fundamentally rethink how they develop their next generation of lawyers. But with the right approach, this transition offers an exciting opportunity: as AI handles routine work, associates can focus on the sophisticated legal analysis and strategic counsel that will be expected by clients and that the associates hoped to do when they went to law school in the first place.

[1] Richard Tromans, Artificial Lawyer, October 28, 2024, https://www.artificiallawyer.com/2024/10/28/how-do-we-train-junior-lawyers-in-the-age-of-ai/

A Framework for Change

Hotshot's work with half the Am Law 100 and many other law firms has given us unique insights into how firms are adapting their associate learning strategies for the age of AI.

This paper looks at emerging best practices and provides a framework for rethinking associate training, focusing on:

- How the evolving associate role is changing training needs
- Essential skills and knowledge
- Effective learning formats and delivery methods
- How to think about allocating budget and people to develop and deliver training

"The first question that comes up is always: who will train them in the future and who will pay for it?"

Richard Tromans, Artificial Lawyer, October 2024

The Evolving Role of Associates

The legal industry has moved past debating whether to adopt GenAI — it's now a matter of when and how. A 2024 LexisNexis survey found that over 90% of senior law firm executives expect their investment in GenAI technologies to increase over the next five years. [2]

[2] LexisNexis, "2024 Investing in Legal Innovation Survey: The Rise of GenAI at Top Firms & Corporations" (https://www.lexisnexis.com/en-us/products/lexis-plus-ai/thought-leadership.page)

This shift is already visible in how firms operate. Today, AI is being deployed across a range of traditional associate tasks, from document review and due diligence to legal research and case summaries. Firms are also using the technology for contract analysis and basic drafting work that once took up much of a junior associate's time.

As a result, associates' day-to-day work is changing significantly. Rather than spending time on routine tasks, they're increasingly focused on higher-value work: interpreting and validating AI-generated output, providing strategic analysis, and communicating complex implications to clients. This shift requires a different set of skills and creates new opportunities for meaningful client work early in an associate's career.

Goodwin's approach to first-year associate training (described later in this paper) illustrates this evolution in associate work. "Instead of having new associates doing the first round of [document] review manually, we envision having them do quality control for the technology's review," explains Caitlin Vaughn, Managing Director of Learning and Professional Development. "That takes a different skillset and judgment level."

As firms like Goodwin recognize, the challenge now is how to develop these capabilities without the traditional learning that came from repetitive, billable tasks.

For young lawyers, I think the law is going to become a really good place in which to practice. There are lots of tales about how law is a driving and grueling career, but actually, the impact of generative AI will remove a lot of the drudgery in junior lawyers' work.

Reena SenGupta, Executive Director, RSGI, Research Partner for FT Innovative Lawyers

Three Questions for a Learning Strategy: What, How, and Who?

Meeting this challenge requires a fresh approach to associate development. Based on our work with leading firms, we see three fundamental questions that shape an effective training strategy for the age of AI:

- **What** should associates learn?
- **How** should they learn it?
- **Who** should develop and deliver the training?

These questions form the foundation of our framework, which draws from both established educational principles and our observations of how leading firms are adapting their training programs.

The framework consists of three integrated components:

1. **Curriculum Development** (What) — The foundation of the strategy, focusing on the essential knowledge and skills associates need
2. **Learning Formats** (How) — Three complementary approaches to delivering this knowledge: on-demand, interactive, and experiential learning
3. **Resource Prioritization** (Who) — Strategic allocation of internal and external resources to maximize effectiveness and efficiency of a training program

WHAT — **Curriculum Development**
Legal | Business | Technology | Professional

HOW — **Learning Format**
On Demand | Interactive | Experiential

WHO — **Resource Prioritization**
Budgets | People

While each firm's implementation will vary based on specific needs and culture, these core elements provide a structured approach to building a training program for the age of AI.

> **I think [GenAI is] going to change the day-to-day job. I think it's going to make everyone's job better. I think it's going to reduce the grunt work that people do. And honestly, I think that's a good thing. It'll help free people up to do more interesting, higher level, complex and sophisticated work that we all love doing.**
>
> **It'll probably mean a different approach to training because the on-the-job training of rote repetition will hopefully be gone, but that means that it's incumbent on supervising lawyers to find other routes to give associates that exposure in a meaningful way.**

Adam Shevell, Partner, Perkins Coie

Curriculum Development: What Associates Should Learn

What should law firms teach their associates to make sure they are prepared for the AI era? Our work with top firms points to four essential categories of skills and knowledge:

- Legal
- Technology
- Business
- Professional

While these categories aren't new, what's changing is their scope and how they intersect.

> **I think the skillset we need to be honing has to do with agility. How are we thinking about constant growth? How are we thinking about always leveling up? And how are we thinking about continuing to learn about technologies that may not feel comfortable or in line with the type of work we're accustomed to doing?**
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> *Whitney Stefko, Associate Director + Senior Counsel, Legal Ops+, Ford Motor Company*

Take substantive legal training, for example. It's no longer enough to teach associates the fundamentals of due diligence or contract review. They now need to understand how AI tools analyze documents, how to validate AI-generated work, and how to identify issues that AI might miss. Similarly, technology training has evolved beyond teaching how to use the document management system — associates need true AI literacy to work effectively with these new tools.

Legal

Legal knowledge and skills remain the foundation of associate development. But, as AI takes over routine legal tasks and introduces new legal issues, curriculums are evolving as well.

Traditional junior associate training focused on teaching concepts and processes — what due diligence is, how to review contracts, why certain provisions matter. Today's programs need to cover all that and go further.

In due diligence, for example, associates now need to learn:

- How to use and supervise AI tools effectively
- How to validate AI-generated work product
- How to identify key business and legal implications
- How to develop strategic recommendations
- How to communicate findings effectively to clients

This evolution extends across practice areas. In tech transactions, for instance, firms are training associates on new considerations that come up when reviewing and negotiating AI-related provisions in license agreements.

Technology

As technology transforms legal practice, forward-thinking firms are helping their associates develop true technological fluency — moving beyond basic familiarity with legal tech tools to deep understanding of emerging technologies and their implications for legal work.

Generative AI has quickly become a central focus of technology training at firms. Effective AI training goes beyond teaching specific tools — associates are learning to understand the underlying technology, its capabilities and limitations, and how to leverage it effectively and ethically in legal practice.

Key areas covered in leading AI training programs include:

- **AI Fundamentals**: Understanding the core concepts, terms, and issues relating to AI technology
- **GenAI Applications**: Understanding capabilities and limitations specific to generative AI tools (in general and regarding the firm's specific platforms and tools)
- **Prompting**: Techniques for effectively instructing and interacting with AI systems
- **Legal Use Cases**: Practical applications of AI across different practice areas
- **Ethics and Responsibility**: Professional obligations when using AI, including bias awareness
- **Output Validation**: Methods for evaluating and verifying AI-generated content
- **Data Security**: Privacy and confidentiality considerations when using AI tools

> **"The influx of AI is also set to redefine the roles and skills required of talent within law firms. The traditional role of the lawyer is evolving, with a growing emphasis on technological proficiency."** [3]
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> *Mike Suchsland, Board Member, Advisor, and Investor*

[3] Mike Suchsland, The Most Profound Innovation: AI's Impact on the Business of Law, law.com, October 21, 2024, https://www.law.com/legaltechnews/2024/10/21/the-most-profound-innovation-ais-impact-on-the-business-of-law/

While AI proficiency is essential, it's not the only kind of technical acumen that's needed. Firms are expanding their tech training to ensure associates have comprehensive technological skills that clients increasingly expect, including:

- **Core Business Tools**: Advanced training in Microsoft 365 applications, especially as these tools integrate AI capabilities
- **Legal Tech Platforms**: Proficiency with practice-specific tools like case management systems, document automation platforms, and time/billing software
- **Emerging Technologies**: Understanding of blockchain, smart contracts, and other innovations affecting legal practice

"There's a world in which we're going to want our first- and second-year associates to be trained in essentially prompt engineering, in interacting with these models and figuring out the best way to get the most accurate output. The second thing that I think our junior lawyers are going to have to be trained on is how to then analyze and evaluate the accuracy, the completeness of these outputs."

David Simons, Partner, Boies Schiller

Business

Business acumen has long been part of law firm training curriculums, and its importance is growing as associates take on more sophisticated work as their role evolves. Firms are expanding their business training programs to help associates better understand clients' commercial context and strategic objectives.

Firms are prioritizing several key areas in their business training:

- **Industry Knowledge**: Clients increasingly expect their lawyers to understand their business context. Firms are developing industry-focused training that covers:

    - Business models and revenue drivers
    - Competitive dynamics and market trends
    - Key regulatory considerations
    - Common legal and business risks

- **Finance Concepts**: Training covers essential financial metrics (like EBITDA, ROI, and leverage ratios) and corporate finance fundamentals. Associates learn about different financing options available to companies - from traditional debt and equity to more complex instruments — and how these choices align with business strategy. This knowledge lets them participate meaningfully in conversations about business performance and capital structure decisions.
- **Accounting Fundamentals**: Associates learn to read and interpret financial statements, understand how they interconnect, and assess a company's financial position. This foundational knowledge helps them engage more effectively in client discussions and spot potential issues during due diligence.
- **Practice-Specific Applications**: Programs teach associates how accounting and finance concepts arise in their specific practice areas. For example:
    - Litigators learn to work with financial experts and analyze financial evidence
    - Corporate associates learn to identify key financial issues in M&A due diligence
    - Bankruptcy associates learn to analyze cash flow statements and financial projections

Many firms are taking a progressive approach, with training becoming more sophisticated as associates advance. Junior associates start with basic accounting and finance concepts, while senior associates tackle more complex topics like analyzing financial sections of SEC filings, understanding valuation reports, and evaluating complex financing structures.

> **These days, sophisticated clients aren't just looking for lawyers who can navigate the legal labyrinth; they want those who can also dance at the business ball. Our associates need to be bilingual, fluent in both legalese and business-speak, to provide the kind of strategic advice that's expected in the c-suite.**
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> *Wilson Chu, Partner, McDermott Will & Emery, and former Chair of the ABA M&A Committee*

Professional

As routine tasks become automated, firms are focusing more attention on developing associates' professional skills. With clients increasingly turning to their lawyers for critical thinking and strategic analysis, these capabilities are becoming as important as traditional legal skills.

Firms are emphasizing several key areas in their professional skills training:

- **Critical Thinking**: Training focuses on analyzing complex situations, identifying key issues, and developing reasoned solutions. This includes evaluating AI-generated content and determining how to apply it effectively to client matters.
- **Communication**: Associates learn to explain complex legal and technical concepts clearly to different audiences, from clients to colleagues. Training emphasizes both written and verbal communication skills, including how to present findings and recommendations effectively.
- **Emotional Intelligence**: Programs help associates develop skills for managing relationships with clients, colleagues, and other stakeholders. This includes reading social cues, showing empathy, and adapting communication styles to different situations.

- **Project Management**: Associates learn to oversee complex matters effectively, including managing both team members and AI tools. Training covers delegation, timeline management, and coordination across practice groups.
- **Leadership**: Programs focus on guiding teams and initiatives effectively, taking ownership of outcomes, and helping develop junior team members' capabilities.
- **Collaboration**: Training emphasizes working effectively in diverse teams, including collaborating with both colleagues and AI tools to deliver optimal client solutions.

Training in these professional skills often aligns with key transition points in an associate's career path. For instance, many firms focus on foundational communication and teamwork skills during the first year, add project management training as associates begin overseeing portions of matters, and introduce leadership development as they start supervising junior lawyers and working directly with clients.

The Case for Formal Curriculums

While some firms rely on on-the-job learning to develop their associates, this approach often leads to inconsistent skill development and makes it hard to deliver comprehensive training at scale. A formal curriculum provides structure and ensures all associates develop similar skills.

Benefits of Formal Curriculums:

- **Consistent Skill Development**: Document specific skills and knowledge required at each experience level
- **Quality Control**: Ensure consistent training across practice groups and offices
- **Gap Analysis**: Track progress and identify areas needing additional focus
- **Resource Mapping**: Link relevant training materials to specific skills
- **Scalability**: Support comprehensive development programs that can grow with the firm

Many firms are developing curriculums that address distinct needs at junior, mid-level, and senior associate levels. They're also creating clear connections between skills and available training resources. For example, firms often map specific Hotshot content to different skill areas, ensuring associates can access relevant training materials when needed.

Building for AI: Consider aligning curriculum development with your firm's AI implementation strategy. As you introduce new AI tools and workflows, map out how these changes affect required skills at different levels. This forward-looking approach helps ensure your curriculum anticipates and supports the evolving roles of associates, rather than just documenting current needs.

At our firm, we've been building out on-demand curriculums. We're starting to be able to say, 'hey, as a midlevel associate, we've made these resources available to you to get to the next level.' And we're building them out on a practice group level, which has been easier with the benefit of Hotshot.

We're still going to do a live training and also make it experiential if we can, but if not, we can offer associates ways in which they can learn on their own without relying on the stories from a partner who did it twenty-five years ago when all of the processes were different.

Sarah Stein, Director of Learning and Professional Development, Crowell & Moring

Learning Format: How Associates Should Learn

The second question in our framework addresses *how* firms should teach their associates. We see three essential pillars for effective training: **On-Demand**, **Interactive**, and **Experiential**. Each serves a different purpose, and the most successful firms are using all three.

> **Each learning modality serves a distinct purpose, but their real power comes from how they work together. On-demand resources let associates build foundational knowledge when they need it, interactive learning helps them develop practical judgment, and experiential training creates opportunities to apply that knowledge under partner guidance. At McDermott, we think strategically about how to deploy each modality for maximum impact. Sometimes that means using on-demand content to prepare associates for live sessions, other times it means following up experiential training with interactive exercises to reinforce key concepts. The key is understanding that these aren't separate tools — they're interconnected components of a comprehensive learning strategy.**
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> 
> *Laura Friedman, Senior Professional Development Manager, McDermott, Will & Emery*

On-Demand Learning

On-demand learning lets associates learn at the point of need. Consider a litigation associate preparing for their first deposition they have coming up next week. They want to do a great job, so they're looking for practical guidance to prepare and work with their witness. A CLE program or training session they attended months ago probably won't help in that scenario.

We're seeing many firms provide on-demand access to high-quality learning content that can be used in these situations. The best content is:

- **Accessible**: Easy to find and use. Even better if it works well on mobile devices.
- **Digestible**: Quick to consume and apply. Short, practical videos tend to work better than long scholarly articles or 6-hour CLE recordings. And let's face it — this might be the age of AI, but it's also the age of TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram Reels. We're all used to learning through short, practical videos.

- **Relevant**: Focused on the task at hand. If you want to help associates close a deal, sending them articles about recent case law developments isn't going to help much.

On-demand learning is especially helpful with remote and hybrid working, when associates can't wander down the hall to ask a colleague for help.

GENAI FOR DEVELOPING LEARNING CONTENT

GenAI is opening up new opportunities to create compelling on-demand content. These tools are still in their infancy, but experimenting with them can provide useful results now and shows their promise for the future. We recommend playing around with tools like these:

- Using video AI platforms like HeyGen or Synthesia to create avatar-based videos for firm-specific content or to translate existing videos into different languages for global teams
- Creating audio summaries of complex documents using Google's NotebookLM, turning dense text into easily digestible podcast-style content
- Leveraging large language models like ChatGPT or Claude to help create targeted practice scenarios based on your firm's matters

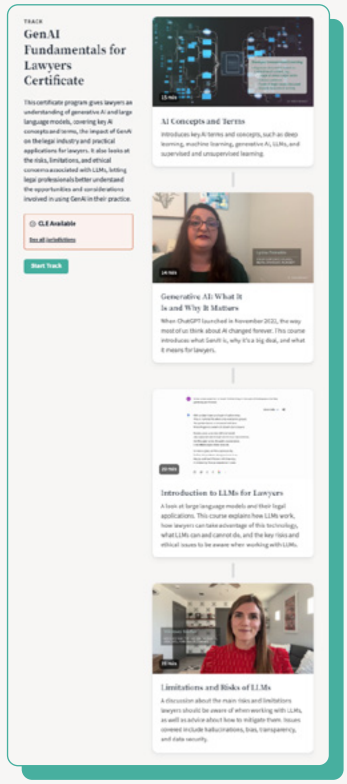
For companies like Hotshot that develop professional on-demand learning content, AI tools enable more efficient content development while maintaining high editorial standards and production quality. This means we can create more content, iterate faster, and respond more quickly to emerging topics. For instance, while we still use professional actors in our videos, AI tools can help fix pronunciation issues without requiring expensive re-recording sessions. Our subject matter experts can use tools like ChatGPT to assist with writing and editing — while maintaining careful oversight and control of the finished product.

The key is combining AI capabilities with human expertise and quality control to create the best possible learning experience for associates.

GUIDING ASSOCIATE LEARNING

While sometimes learning needs are obvious — like when preparing for next week's deposition — associates often need guidance on what to learn next. A fourth-year associate taking on more client management responsibility might not know all the skills they should develop, and a new associate rotating through practice areas needs help understanding where to start.

A Hotshot learning track



Many firms are making their on-demand content even more effective by creating learning tracks — curated playlists of videos and materials for specific topics or user groups. Think of them like Spotify playlists, but for legal training. A track might focus on a particular skill (like document review) or be designed for a specific group (like mid-level corporate associates).

As AI continues to evolve, we expect to see more sophisticated approaches to personalization. Learning platforms will be able to provide targeted content recommendations based on multiple factors, including:

- Matters an associate has been assigned to work on
- Knowledge gaps identified through AI-powered assessments
- Learning patterns of users with similar profiles and experience levels
- Practice area-specific needs and requirements

This kind of intelligent content curation will help ensure associates get the right training at the right time — much like how streaming services customize their recommendations for each user, but with deep understanding of legal practice needs and development goals.

Interactive Learning

Interactive learning moves beyond passive consumption of information to active engagement with the material. Instead of just watching or reading about a concept, associates make decisions and see the results of their choices. This helps develop practical judgment and critical thinking - skills that are especially valuable as AI takes on more routine legal tasks.

Good interactive learning typically includes:

- **Practice Scenarios**: Realistic situations where associates apply what they've learned
- **Knowledge Checks**: Quick ways to test understanding and identify gaps
- **Simulated Client Interactions**: Opportunities to practice client communication
- **Decision Trees**: Scenarios where different choices lead to different outcomes

WHAT'S POSSIBLE WITH AI

AI is creating new opportunities for interactive learning. For example:

- Chatbots that simulate client conversations
- Scenarios that adapt based on an associate's practice area
- Systems that give immediate, personalized feedback
- Exercises that become more challenging as associates improve
- Complex simulations involving multiple parties

HOW HOTSHOT IS USING INTERACTIVE EXERCISES

We're experimenting with adding AI-powered interactive exercises into Hotshot. For example, after a junior associate watches a course on M&A deal structures, they can work through a scenario where they're given specific facts about a client's deal and must determine the most appropriate deal structure. It's like they're chatting with a senior associate who can guide and challenge them, helping them think through the issues.

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning is a vital component of associate development that becomes even more valuable as AI transforms legal practice. Often called "learning by doing," this educational approach moves beyond one-way lectures to engage learners in direct, hands-on experience with practical scenarios. Rather than just hearing about concepts, participants actively work through situations that mirror real-world challenges.

In the law firm context, this approach is particularly powerful because it creates natural opportunities for knowledge transfer between generations of lawyers. Partners and senior associates guide junior lawyers through simulated matters, sharing not just technical skills but also firm-specific expertise and best practices. This creates a compelling combination: associates develop practical skills they can immediately apply to client work while absorbing their firm's unique approach and institutional knowledge.

THE GROWING IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING BY DOING

As AI increasingly handles routine tasks traditionally assigned to junior associates, the value of experiential learning has grown substantially. Firms need to accelerate skill development for their associates, who must now tackle more sophisticated work earlier in their careers. These programs provide a safe environment for associates to practice complex tasks before handling actual client matters, while simultaneously building crucial relationships with senior lawyers who can mentor them throughout their careers.

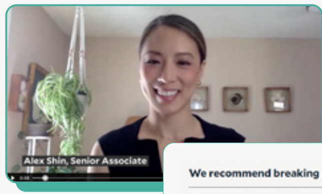
Experiential learning also allows learners to develop multiple skill sets simultaneously. When working through a simulated M&A transaction, for example, associates aren't just learning about deal mechanics — they're also practicing client communication, using the firm's technology platforms, and developing project management skills. This mirrors the complexity of actual client work and helps associates develop the multifaceted capabilities they'll need to succeed.

DESIGNING EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS

The most successful experiential learning programs build on a foundation of thoughtful design. They typically begin with realistic scenarios (sometimes drawn from the firm's actual matters), carefully modified to highlight specific learning objectives. Senior lawyers play a central role, providing guidance and feedback that helps associates understand not just what to do, but why and how to do it the firm's way. Programs often progress in complexity over time, allowing associates to systematically build their capabilities while tackling increasingly challenging situations.

AI is also creating new opportunities for how firms design and deliver these programs. Large language models can help create more sophisticated training scenarios that better reflect the complexity of modern legal practice. AI can help with the preparation work for training materials, freeing up partners to focus on the high-value guidance and mentorship that only they can provide.

However, creating effective experiential learning programs remains a significant undertaking that requires careful consideration of resources. Even with AI assistance, developing realistic scenarios, coordinating senior lawyer involvement, and managing practical logistics demand substantial time and effort. As we discuss in the Resource Allocation section, firms need to think strategically about where to invest their training resources and how to balance internal development with external support.



From the Hotshot M&A Simulation

HOTSHOT'S EXPERIENTIAL OFFERINGS

Hotshot has developed two experiential learning offerings used by our customers: Simulations and Discussions. Both help firms create meaningful interactions between senior and junior lawyers without spending valuable time developing materials from scratch.

Simulations are more comprehensive and give firms all the materials needed to run a mock transaction, while Discussions give firms materials that let them run one-hour, interactive sessions on a range of legal and business topics like civil litigation, transactional practice areas, and business and technology issues.

These offerings let partners focus on teaching and sharing their expertise and firm specifics rather than creating materials, while associates get hands-on experience working through mock deals and scenarios as opposed to sitting through lectures.

It's going to be important to have more structured learning, experiential and simulation-based learning, with real measurable outcomes of whether you're getting the right information and making sure it's the information you actually need to have to do the work that you're being asked to do, which is going to be different work in the future. And then spending as much time as possible with senior practitioners to see what it is that they're doing. You know, how are they talking about what questions are they asking? How do they explain these concepts to their clients? I think that's really what junior lawyers should be spending their time doing.

Joe Green, Head of Innovation, Gunderson Dettmer

Associates probably won't be doing traditional diligence where they'll look through documents for a few days. I still think they should go through the exercise of doing diligence manually - at least once. We need to preserve that, and manage staffing to make sure that people do the basic task at least one time, and then they can shift to using technology to do it a lot faster.

Lauren Hakala, Head of Learning & Development, Reed Smith

MAKING IT WORK

Our work with leading firms has revealed several essential elements of successful experiential learning programs:

- **Have Partners Lead the Training**: While firms can use external resources for basic content, having partners lead the actual training creates invaluable opportunities for relationship building and passing on firm knowledge.

- **Move Away from Lectures**: Break from the traditional approach of lecture-based training. Instead, have associates review key concepts through videos and materials before sessions, so that live time with partners can focus entirely on hands-on practice and active discussion. This "flipped classroom" approach makes much better use of everyone's time — especially valuable partner time.
- **Make Technology Real**: Give associates hands-on practice with the firm's actual platforms and AI tools in realistic scenarios, so they're ready to use them on client matters.
- **Share War Stories and Firm Practices**: Have partners incorporate real examples from their experience and explain how your firm handles specific situations. This helps maintain the firm's unique approach — particularly important as AI handles more routine work.
- **Build in Regular Feedback**: Create ongoing opportunities for guidance, from real-time feedback during simulations to detailed debriefing sessions. This helps associates develop judgment and confidence with increasingly complex work.

Resource Prioritization: Who Should Develop and Deliver Training

The final part of our framework considers *who* should develop and deliver law firm training programs.

THE CASE FOR INTERNAL DEVELOPMENT

There's a compelling argument that firms should increase their investment in internally developed training. The argument goes like this: as AI handles more routine work, a firm's unique expertise, judgment, and approach become crucial differentiators. This distinctive way of practicing — from how partners structure deals to how they counsel clients through complex decisions — will likely be the key factor setting firms apart in the future. Since only the firm itself can effectively teach its special approach, firm-led training becomes a critical strategic priority.

While the case for internal development is strong, practical constraints require a thoughtful approach. Partners and senior lawyers who are best positioned to develop and deliver training are often the firm's busiest practitioners. Their time is both valuable and limited. Moreover, not everything needs to be developed internally - many foundational skills and knowledge areas are common across firms.

The solution is a balanced approach that preserves valuable internal resources for truly firm-differentiating elements while leveraging external resources for other components. This ensures firms maintain their competitive advantage through unique expertise while delivering comprehensive training efficiently.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR RESOURCE ALLOCATION

Leading firms are taking a systematic approach to deciding what to develop internally versus source externally. Key considerations include:

- **Strategic Value**: How crucial is the content to the firm's competitive advantage?
- **Expertise Requirements**: Does the content require deep knowledge of firm-specific practices?
- **Resource Intensity**: How much partner and senior lawyer time would internal development require?
- **Update Frequency**: How often will the content need revision to stay current?
- **Scale and Reach**: How many associates need the training, and how often?

Successful implementation typically includes:

- **Preserve Internal Resources for High-Value Training**
  - Partner-led sessions focusing on firm strategy and approach
  - Practice group-specific training on dealing with complex client situations
  - Firm-specific technology and workflow training
  - Mentoring and feedback on sophisticated legal work

- **Leverage External Resources for Foundation Elements**
  - General legal and business concepts
  - Industry-standard technology training
  - Professional skills development
  - Interactive learning tools and platforms
- **Create Efficient Integration Points**
  - Use external content as pre-work for internal training sessions
  - Layer firm-specific examples and guidance on top of standard content
  - Combine external learning platforms with internal expertise
  - Build consistent evaluation methods across internal and external training
- **Maintain Quality Control**
  - Regular review of external content for accuracy and relevance
  - Clear alignment between external resources and firm objectives
  - Consistent feedback loops from associates and partners
  - Ongoing assessment of training effectiveness

Conclusion

AI isn't just changing how associates work — it's transforming how they develop into effective lawyers. As routine tasks are automated, associates can focus earlier in their careers on the sophisticated legal work that truly drives value for clients. The challenge for firms is how to accelerate this development without the traditional learning that came from hands-on experience with routine work.

Leading firms are meeting this challenge by fundamentally rethinking their approach to associate development. They're building comprehensive programs that combine:

- **Modern Curriculums**: Moving beyond traditional legal training to develop the full range of skills associates need in the AI era — from understanding how AI tools work to communicating complex implications to clients
- **Varied Learning Formats**: Leveraging a mix of on-demand, interactive, and experiential learning to create engaging, effective training that works for today's associates
- **Strategic Resource Allocation**: Thoughtfully balancing internal expertise with external resources to deliver high-quality training at scale while preserving what makes each firm unique

The most successful firms recognize that this evolution in training isn't just about adapting to AI — it's about preparing associates to do sophisticated, rewarding work. By developing associates who can work effectively with AI while bringing judgment, creativity, and strategic thinking to complex problems, firms are positioning themselves and their clients for success in the AI era.

The firms that get this right will have a significant advantage in recruiting, developing, and retaining top talent. More importantly, they'll be building the next generation of lawyers who can deliver the sophisticated counsel clients increasingly expect — lawyers who embrace technology while bringing the uniquely human skills that technology can't replace.

Case Studies

Crowell & Moring's Strategic Use of Video-Based Learning

Crowell & Moring demonstrates how firms can effectively use video-based learning both as a standalone resource and to complement live training programs. The firm has successfully implemented this approach across multiple initiatives, including their mini-MBA program and GenAI training. While the content works well for independent learning, the firm has found success using it strategically to create more impactful live learning experiences.

"Understanding when our learners are interested in learning something is probably the hardest job that I have," explains Sarah Stein, Director of Learning and Professional Development at Crowell. On-demand resources help address this challenge by allowing lawyers to access training when they need it most.

MINI-MBA PROGRAM

The firm's PD team used video-based content from Hotshot to bring an MBA mindset to their lawyers, focusing particularly on helping them understand business from the client's perspective. They carefully curated specific Hotshot courses on financial concepts, financial statements, and accounting to build a foundation of business knowledge before live sessions. This approach created a safe space for lawyers at all levels to learn concepts they might have been hesitant to admit they didn't fully understand.

The program's reach extended well beyond its initial target audience of 4th through 6th-year associates, demonstrating the power of digital learning to serve different audiences. The PD team carefully curated content for each group's specific needs: for example, partners and counsel received targeted recommendations for two or three specific Hotshot courses most relevant to their needs, while staff were guided to more business-focused content. This ability to precisely target content to different audiences while maintaining everything in one accessible place through their learning management system was a significant benefit of the firm's on-demand approach.

GENAI TRAINING

The firm applied a similar successful approach to their required GenAI training for anyone leveraging GenAI. "With GenAI, it's essential that our lawyers and professional staff understand the technology, along with its risks and benefits," notes Stein. The video-based content from Hotshot helps ensure lawyers grasp fundamental principles needed to engage with the technology effectively, while live sessions can focus on practical applications, new ethical guidance, and emerging developments. Like in the mini-MBA program, this combination of formats allows lawyers to learn foundational concepts at their own pace while maximizing the value of the additional programming that Crowell puts together.

MAKING LIVE SESSIONS MORE VALUABLE

Across both their mini-MBA and GenAI programs, the firm used video content as pre-work for live sessions, allowing them to make better use of everyone's time. As Stein explains: "When it came time for us to bring people together in person, they already had relevant resources and materials, and the attendees were coming in ready with questions, instead of absorbing all of the information during a lecture and then having questions once the subject matter experts were out the door."

For the mini-MBA program, this approach lets the firm move beyond basics during live sessions and dive deeper into topics like law firm profitability and complex financial concepts. The combination proved particularly effective because participants could return to the on-demand content after sessions to reinforce their learning, while the live sessions could focus on interactive discussion and real-world applications.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Several factors contributed to the program's effectiveness:

- Using video learning to establish foundations before in-person sessions
- Integration with the firm's learning management system, creating a single access point
- Careful curation of Hotshot content specific to lawyers' needs

- Social elements to drive engagement (e.g., issuing certificates of completion that can be shared on LinkedIn)
- Flexibility for learners to engage at their own pace, whether as part of a structured program or for independent learning

The approach has benefited both the learners and the PD team. As Stein notes, “having that on-demand piece also lightens the load for my team.” The combination of formats allows the firm to deliver comprehensive training that meets lawyers where they are while making the most of valuable face-to-face time. And for lawyers who can’t attend live sessions or prefer to learn independently, the on-demand content provides a complete learning solution on its own.

Building Curriculums and a Culture of Learning at Brown Rudnick

Brown Rudnick demonstrates how firms can create a culture of learning that evolves with an associate's career trajectory while preparing them for future roles. The firm not only develops learning strategies targeted to practice areas and career stages, but thoughtfully ensures creative and scalable delivery solutions.

A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO LEARNING DESIGN

"We look at the progression of learning needs of our associates and target curriculums — take for example the trajectory from summers to first years," explains Marianne Bellino, Learning Executive at Brown Rudnick. "In general, we're thinking about continuous learning opportunities for everyone at the firm."

The firm takes a largely practice-area-based approach, developing distinct learning paths for lawyers in areas like litigation, corporate, and restructuring, and thinks strategically about timing and scope. For example, the learning paths for summers are more foundational than what they'll receive when they join the firm as first-year associates.

FROM CURRICULUM TO COMPREHENSIVE TRAINING

Brown Rudnick's approach goes beyond simply identifying learning needs and creating curriculums. "With any experience that we're designing, we're looking at an opportunity for a blended approach which is not only in the classroom, but also complemented by on-demand and peer learning," explains Bellino. The firm builds complete learning experiences by thoughtfully matching development resources and methods to curriculum goals.

"We want there to be a marriage between what we're doing on demand and what we're doing in the classroom," explains Bellino. For each practice area, they determine priority learning needs with the firm's partners and also engage providers like Hotshot to supplement in-class lessons with on-demand sessions.

This flexibility in learning formats is particularly valuable for busy associates. As Bellino notes, "the on-demand resources allow our lawyers to access focused training when they need it, even if they can't attend live sessions." This approach ensures that essential knowledge is available to associates in formats that work with their schedules and learning preferences.

In addition, the benefit of offering on-demand learning as pre-work means that associates arrive at the live programs already grounded in core concepts. Partners can then focus on higher-value teaching – sharing practical insights, firm-specific approaches, and real-world applications. The result is more engaging and efficient live sessions where associates actively apply their knowledge while benefiting from the guidance of more senior lawyers at the firm.

EARLIER INTRODUCTION OF PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

While some firms delay the introduction of certain professional skills until associates are more senior, Brown Rudnick takes a more comprehensive approach to associate development. They believe that professional skills like project management, delegation, and client relationship management should be developed alongside legal expertise from early in an associate's career.

"When it comes to core skills like managing projects, or delegation, or client management, there is no time like the present to start to learn these and contribute to future success," Bellino explains.

This philosophy extends to business development training as well. "As you progress in your career, the focus shifts from knowing all the fundamentals of being a great lawyer to client retention and new matter metrics. As such, associates need to start learning that skill the minute they step in the door."

INTEGRATION WITH TALENT DEVELOPMENT

The firm recognizes that effective learning must align with broader development goals and firm culture. As Bellino emphasizes, "Whatever you decide to do, it has to be integrated into all facets of your talent process to ensure a culture of learning." This integrated approach ensures that programs support both immediate needs and long-term career development while maintaining flexibility to adapt as skill needs evolve.

Building Fundamentals Before Automation at Wilson Sonsini

Wilson Sonsini demonstrates how experiential learning can prepare associates for technology-enabled practice by first ensuring they master fundamental concepts. The firm developed an incorporation automation platform and, rather than immediately giving associates access to it, the firm created a hands-on training program to help associates build essential knowledge and judgment.

THE CHALLENGE

Partners and senior attorneys at Wilson Sonsini identified a critical need: associates using Neuron, their proprietary incorporation automation platform for early-stage clients, were sometimes struggling to evaluate automated outputs effectively. “Associates were having a harder time understanding what’s market or what are typical terms within an incorporation request,” explains Martha Frabizio, Senior Manager of Legal Education, “and if a client deviated from standard terms, they weren’t always easily able to identify issues.” The firm recognized that before associates could effectively use automation tools, they needed deeper understanding of incorporation fundamentals and market practices.

THE SOLUTION: A COMPREHENSIVE LEARNING APPROACH

The program begins with foundational learning, where associates review Hotshot videos covering incorporation basics and corporate governance fundamentals, along with internally created materials. This pre-work ensures everyone starts with a solid understanding of key concepts.

The experiential component then unfolds in two phases. In Phase One, associates analyze mock client incorporation requests, working individually to identify potential issues and develop client advice. They then meet in small office-based groups with senior attorneys who guide detailed discussions using prepared materials to ensure consistent learning across the firm.

Phase Two moves to hands-on practice, where associates draft incorporation documents “the old school way.” Working from the firm’s standard forms and a detailed client questionnaire, associates prepare document sets without using automation tools. After submitting their redlines, they review model answers and participate in a second round of small group discussions focused on market terms and standard practices.

PROGRAM DESIGN AND IMPACT

The program's effectiveness stems from several key elements: tailored small group discussions that enable robust dialogue, peer-to-peer learning, and multiple touchpoints for reinforcing concepts. The format creates natural mentoring opportunities while ensuring associates develop strong foundational knowledge.

Partner support has been strong because the business need is clear — associates who understand the fundamentals make better use of automation tools and can spot potential issues more effectively. "It's important to explain thoughtfully to them why we're making you do this before we unleash you on the platform," notes Frabizio.

Building on this model's success, the firm plans to continue to offer this program to future first-year associates and has plans to expand this type of program to venture financing work and create programs aimed at more experienced associates.

INTEGRATION WITH INTERACTIVE LEARNING

The incorporation training program is part of Wilson Sonsini's broader approach to associate development. "We use a mix of learning tools to support different training needs," explains Sally Raggio, Director of Legal Education & Development. For example, the firm strategically deploys on-demand learning through Hotshot for a variety of topics and practice areas, as well as platforms like Praktio for skills like due diligence and contract drafting, either as required elements or optional supplements depending on the topic. This multi-modal approach ensures associates can continue developing their skills independently or as part of more structured training programs.

How Goodwin's Award-Winning Associate Training Program Balances Internal and External Resources

Goodwin's first-year associate training program demonstrates how firms can effectively allocate resources, balancing internal expertise with external materials to create comprehensive associate training for the GenAI era.

Their Learning + Professional Development (L+PD) team created an innovative eight-week training program that maximizes the value of partner time while leveraging external resources for scalable, foundational learning. This program won the Financial Times award for best "People & Skills" program in 2024.

The program includes two comprehensive tracks: a Business Law Department (BLD) Practice Lab where associates handle eight different transactions for a hypothetical fitness app company, and a litigation program where they manage a trade secrets case for a fictional shoe company. Through these immersive scenarios, associates gain hands-on experience with the full lifecycle of matters they'll encounter in practice.

STRATEGIC RESOURCE ALLOCATION

The L+PD team built its program around what it calls a "three-legged stool" of training:

1. **External On-Demand Content**: Short, foundational videos from Hotshot provide essential background knowledge before live sessions
2. **Internal Expert-Led Training**: Senior attorneys lead live sessions focused on firm-specific approaches and real-world experience
3. **External Interactive Practice**: Interactive exercises from Praktio offer scalable, real-time feedback on simulated work

The program's design carefully preserves valuable partner time for high-impact activities. By having associates complete foundational learning through external resources before live sessions, partners can focus exclusively on sharing firm-specific knowledge, judgment, and approach.

Each program follows detailed hypothetical clients through realistic matters:

- The BLD Practice Lab follows a fitness app company through entity formation, venture financing, M&A, joint ventures, licensing, and more
- The litigation program tracks a shoe company through complaints, internal investigations, depositions, trial, and post-trial motions

RESULTS AND IMPACT

The hybrid approach has delivered several key benefits:

- Associates learn foundational skills efficiently through proven external resources
- Partners focus their time on sharing firm-specific expertise and judgment
- The L+PD team can scale feedback and practice opportunities without overtaxing internal resources
- Associates develop critical judgment skills in a safe environment before they're needed on client matters, and by developing these skills they'll be better prepared to effectively use AI tools and analyze AI outputs

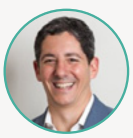
"We're hoping to develop an ownership mindset in our associates earlier and more consistently," says Vaughn. "As the legal industry evolves, they will help us stay ahead and solve problems for our clients proactively."

About Hotshot

Hotshot is a video-based learning platform for lawyers. We offer 300+ short, practical videos across corporate, litigation, and business topics and support on-demand, interactive, and experiential learning. Hotshot's customers include half the Am Law 100 law firms, regional and boutique firms, top law schools, and companies. To learn more visit **hotshotlegal.com**.

Get in Touch

We hope you find this paper helpful. Please get in touch if you'd like to talk about it or any of its concepts. We regularly meet with management committees, professional development teams, and practice group heads to share our experiences working with law firms and provide recommendations on developing training programs for the age of AI.



Ian Nelson
Co-Founder, Hotshot
ian@hotshotlegal.com

Chris Wedgeworth
Co-Founder, Hotshot
chris@hotshotlegal.com

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hotshotlegal.com