

Law Society Education Podcast

June 2021 Transcript

00:02 Eman Hassan

Hello listeners and welcome to our June edition of the Law Society Podcasts. My name is Eman Hassan and I am a solicitor at Fieldfisher.

We're really excited to have with us today Catherine Bamford from Bam Legal, a legal technology consultancy helping to improve the delivery of legal services for all. Catherine is the CEO and founder of Bam Legal. She was named by the Financial Times as a Top 10 Legal Technologist, won a European woman in Law Tech Award in 2020 and is just been listed as a woman of legal Tech 2021 honoree by the American Bar Association.

Welcome, Catherine. How are you?

00: 42 Catherine Bamford

I am really good, thank you. Thank you so much for having me on.

00:45 Eman Hassan

Absolutely, I thank you so much for coming to speak to our listeners today. You are quite the incredible woman, I have to say!

Catherine, can you kick start us off by telling our listeners a bit about your background and what led you to specialise as a legal engineer?

01:02 Catherine Bamford

Of course yeah, so kind of long story short, I started Real Estate Finance with Pinsent Masons, who are known for being a quite innovative firm. I was with them at the very start of that journey - so, the last recession like back in 2006/ 2007 as a newly qualified lawyer - and rather than making all the lawyers redundant as a lot of law firms were sadly having to do because of the financial crash, they decided to look at how they could streamline their processes, you know, give more for less, being asked for by the clients. I was asked to go on an internal secondment to look at how my department could be more efficient and had my hands on some drafting like legal contract document automation software.

Yeah, my inner geek just came fully out of (...) I thought "Gosh, there's so much that we could do with technology to improve the way- especially us junior lawyers- were

running a particular task.” So, that just sparked my interest and then she never went back to fee earning from that day.

02:13 Eman Hassan

Gosh, that’s incredible, isn’t it? One of those kind of journeys that take you somewhere you never expect! That’s amazing.

And can you tell listeners what do you do, Catherine, on a daily basis? Can you give us a bit of a snapshot?

02:27 Catherine Bamford

Of course, yeah. It’s so varied. So, when I started at Pinsent Masons, so I approached them and I said “you know I don’t think I want to go back to fee earning, then I’d really like to keep working with technology and working on improving processes. Can I do it for the whole firm?” which thankfully they said “yes”.

We very much focused at that point on automating the first steps that lawyers would take on any transaction, whether its corporate, banking, IP, regardless... So I did that with Pinsent for three years, grew the team there, and then founded Bam Legal seven years ago now. And it’s been so varied, but... so, it encompasses all forms of legal service transformation. What we do is... most of our clients are like the large global law firms, but we work with smaller bespoke clients as well and in house teams and we end to end the entire process of what they’re doing.

03:20 Catherine Bamford

So, from client getting in touch with new instructions, to completing the deal, saving the documents, reporting to the client... We’ll get the entire process and then we look at how we can you know any potential blockers, any problem areas, which bits take the longest, and then we look at ways to potentially smooth, speed up, make these more efficient. But at the moment, most of our time we still do a lot of helping people with contract automation, so preparing legal contracts using technology, so that it’s done in minutes rather than hours, but at the moment our big focus is actually now on what I call the “final frontier” and it’s speeding up the negotiation process. So, we’re doing a lot around paybooks, data, to get to the point where negotiations take minutes, hours, days rather than weeks and weeks and weeks.

04:13 Eman Hassan

That’s really incredible. How do you see the impact of automation or technology in the legal profession? Can you talk to us a bit about that?

04:23 Catherine Bamford

Of course. I think one bit there is happier lawyers. I think I'm not alone and I know through speaking to junior lawyers, via different social media platforms and events that I do, that unfortunately the reality of life as a lawyer, even at a big big firm, is not what they thought it was going to be at law. And a lot of it is crazy hours, doing a lot of boring admin-type work, and not applying their brains in creative ways like they thought they were going to be able to do to do the true problem solving and help their clients. So, I think happier lawyers, by freeing them up to do the higher-end work that they actually want to do.

04:59 Catherine Bamford

I think happier clients because they're getting a better service. I think often people, especially law firms, forget that they're in the service business. One of the things I quite strongly advocate is the idea of kind of net promoter scores. So, when you get an Uber, you get asked to put with that three out of five or four out of five; when you get Deliveroo or anything like that... you score how the service was. That very rarely happens in the legal industry because they're scared of doing it, because most in-house lawyers said their clients were previously private practise lawyers; they don't think to ask for it, which means not a lot of focus on making the services slick as possible and a happy experience for everyone. So, I think bringing in better processes and better technology the impact it will have, will be happier lawyers and happier clients.

05:56 Eman Hassan

Yeah, that's very interesting and I wonder if you might be able to tell us... are there any common concerns that your clients have shown as well as difficulties that they've had with the adoption of such technologies, or do you not find that?

06:12 Catherine Bamford

Oh no. I think a lot of what I do really is less about tech and more about change management. This is a risk averse industry because that's what we do for clients, we minimise their risks, so embracing new things can be scared and can be seen as risk. There is also the huge problem that lawyers are too busy to spend time improving what they do. So, when you have a huge backlog of work and clients screaming, and partners screaming, we gotta get this deal done by tomorrow... that doesn't give you time to spend an hour talking to your process managers or your technologist about how next time you could do it better. And until law firms allow their lawyers and reward their lawyers for spending time improving what they do and take away the billable-hour reward structure, that's always going to be... That'd be a real challenge.

07:05 Eman Hassan

Yeah, thank you, thanks for that, Catherine. Another interesting topic, I think, is obviously conversations many people have around AI. The fact that sometimes there is that concern around loss of jobs. In your opinion, do you think that it's possible that Law Tech will also lead to the rise of new legal jobs? And how do you think the profession might change?

07:28 Catherine Bamford

Absolutely. I think there's a lot of hype around AI and people need to actually understand what we're actually talking about, so at the moment, the way AI is being used is mainly for search. So, in corporate departments for example, when you used to have a lot of paralegals working through the night, going through hundreds and hundreds of contracts to look for particular clauses - say a change of control provision - you can now use what's called NLP technology, which searches for keywords and relationships between those words to know where that clause is and pull out all the contract that have those clauses in, making them ready for human review. So, we are not talking about AI doing the work of lawyers. At the moment, it's search and sift. So, we need to stop with all the hype of what it actually isn't and fully understand currently what it's doing. In terms of the future, people talk about things like predictive outcomes of cases. So, you go to your lawyer and you say "what's my chances of winning this piece of litigation?" and rather than a trainee going and searching previous past 10 cases, preparing a paper for you and then advising, you could look at every single case in a similar area and look at patterns and trends to maybe get a bit of an idea, but you still going to human lawyer. Now this is done in medicine already, when it's looking at what's the (...) there's something.

08:55 Catherine Bamford

So yeah, I think we need to stop worrying so much about what we're talking about and trust that things will be regulated. And because of the rate of adoption of technology, we're not talking about the whole robots taking over the legal profession.

09:11 Catherine Bamford

There are some really interesting jobs coming up in the legal profession. I had a lovely message from a law graduate this morning, actually on Instagram actually, saying that she had decided not to follow her peers and go into legal technology, rather than the normal practice of law. And she's starting with a legal tech software company for her first internship next week. So as well as the traditional routes into being you into being lawyers, there's gonna be lots more jobs, like legal engineers, legal ops is a huge area that's growing rapidly. So yeah, I think actually there's going to be more and more jobs come out of.

09:53 Eman Hassan

This it sounds quite exciting, actually. It's quite a change for the legal profession, which I think it can be quite good as well, so quite positive. Me on my last question for you Catherine. So obviously with legal tech rising et cetera, in your opinion, what's the role of education and ongoing professional learning in terms of facilitating the adoption of law tech, and how can we support the training for solicitors for jobs in the future?

10:23 Catherine Bamford

Yes, absolutely. See my Instagram account in particular is very much working with and aimed at law students and it's great to see how many of the students are setting up their own legal tech societies.

10:35 Catherine Bamford

In terms of the educators themselves, it is important that we keep teaching black letter law and teaching lawyers how to think as lawyers and to solve problems in the way we always have; that's not going away. But it's great, I think there is a role and responsibility to more start to teach the delivery of this service that we are offering to clients. So, a little bit more business needs to be offered, a little bit more needs to be understood about... You know, it's shocking to me I can speak to the head of corporate of a global law firm and say "what's your profit margin on this piece of work?" and they don't have a clue, because they haven't needed to for years and years and years, but. As technology comes in and new players enter the market, we need to realise that we're in the business of delivering legal services.

11:27 Catherine Bamford

So, training lawyers to be a little bit more business-savvy and to have - I don't think it needs to be compulsory - but to have optional modules around legal technology or just how technology can be applied to legal, doesn't have this whole legal tech. And it is really important, but I do think the students are actually already doing it themselves. The number of legal tech societies that they're creating and setting up themselves and running their own little groups. I think I think the profession would be good to look at, you know, looking outside of LinkedIn and look up the students are doing in other areas in terms of setting up their own hackathons, their own groups, inviting the own speakers. It's really great to see and really inspiring to see.

12:08 Eman Hassan

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, do you think it's something that we should be building into training contracts and the other routes of the qualification? Do you think there should be some training specifically around that?

12:22 Catherine Bamford

I think some great examples I've seen are law firms do include many projects or objectives with the trainees. Trainees are great because they do four seats within a business. So, when I work with law firms, one of the first group I always asked to speak to is the trainee group, because they're generally doing a lot of the more administrative-type work and the repetitive-type work and the stuff that can be quick wins, the low-hanging fruit. So, by making them aware of what technology the law firm has available, they can become your advocates and almost your scouts to go and see what are they doing each day that they think can be improved by tech - and they're not scared of tech, so there's no change management needed there really at all.

13:08 Catherine Bamford

So yeah, so I think building it in or making it an objective in appraisals is a really good thing. So, a question in your appraisal as to "how have you demonstrated improving the service your team offers?" or something like that each year, that would be really, really helpful. But as I said, when you're only rewarding lawyers by the number of hours chargeable hours they record and giving them a bonus based on that, that means that they are not being rewarded if they take a couple of hours out to redesign a process or look at some technology. So that problem needs to be fixed, if you're going to expect your lawyers to help you improve.

13:47 Eman Hassan

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. But I mean you were brilliant Catherine. It's been a complete honour to have you on here, I have to say. And you know you are quite an incredible person and you do a lot, so, thank you so much for taking time out to speak to listeners, know that they will really surely appreciate and take on board what you said.

14:04 Eman Hassan

Is there anything else you would like to tell our listeners or any sort of tips that you want to give them before I let you go?

14:17 Catherine Bamford

I would just say just be curious and maybe, for the next month, think to yourself everyday what am I doing that is a waste of my time and then be curious as to what out there could possibly help you. The best ideas don't come from the head of innovation at a law firm. They don't come from consultants like myself. They come from you thinking how could I do this better and then maybe go to one of the partners, go to someone that you work with and say "I think we could do this a better way".

14:50 Catherine Bamford

So, I'd encourage you all to do that. If anyone wants to ever chat about it, I'm on LinkedIn, I'm on Twitter, and Instagram just @Bamlegal, always happy to brainstorm and share ideas.

15:01 Eman Hassan

That's great, thank you Catherine, and I'm sure a lot of our listeners will take you up on that. Thank you so much for coming on Catherine. Really excited actually to see what the future holds for the legal profession and the technology side of it. Thank you, thank you again.

15:18 Catherine Bamford

Thank you so much.

15:19 Eman Hassan

Thank you for listening to this episode of the Law Society Education podcasts. As usual, we will be back next month with another discussion about Hot Topic in the legal profession. In the mean time you can checkout our educational content on the Law Society Learning page by accessing our website on learn.lawsociety.org.uk. In particular, if you are interested in learning more about legal technology, you can find our bitesize course "Introduction to Law Tech - A practical guide to legal technology". Thank you.