



Michele DeStefano, Professor of Law at Miami University, Affiliated Faculty, Harvard Law School Executive Education and IE Law School; Founder & Director, LawWithoutWalls and MOVEΛAW

Q&A

Professor Michele DeStefano Outlines How to Create an Innovative Collaborative Culture

Michele DeStefano, Professor of Law at Miami University and Founder of LawWithoutWalls, outlines the new expectations of lawyers and how to meet those new expectations.

June 17, 2022 at 09:55 AM

🕒 6 minute read

[Lessons in Leadership](#)

[Abigail Harris](#)

Michele DeStefano is a Professor of Law at Miami University, Affiliated Faculty at Harvard Law School Executive Education and Founder of LawWithoutWalls.

Here, Michele outlines the new expectations of lawyers and how to meet those new expectations. She discusses how GCs can create a culture that encourages creativity and outlines the biggest pitfalls to achieving an innovative collaborative culture. Michele also stresses how important it is for Chief Legal Officers to find a way to empower their team by giving them vision and participation in creating the purpose.

Corporate Counsel Advance: What does innovation mean to you?

Michele DeStefano: Tiny noticeable changes that add real value.

CCA: How can General Counsel create a culture that encourages innovation and creativity?

DeStefano: I have a whole recipe for how to create a culture of creativity, collaboration and innovation, which I will share during my keynote. One of the most important things is for leaders to emulate the behaviors they want the people on their team to emulate. So if the leader themselves brings out their 16 own crayons, then that gives the team license to do the same.

CCA: What do you think will be the skill set of the GC of the future? Do you think it will change or do you think it will stay the same?

DeStefano: Future general counsels will need to be proactive co-collaborators who are insanely client-centric and focused on not just reducing costs and risks but actually creating value and revenue streams.

CCA: What is the trifecta for success in a changing legal landscape?

DeStefano: Creativity, collaboration and innovation.

CCA: What is the 3-4-5 Method of Innovation?

DeStefano: The 3-4-5 method of innovation was designed for professional service providers. It outlines how to get a multidisciplinary team from a problem or opportunity to a very tight lean fit and a viable solution. The 3-4-5 method can be used on any type of project with a multidisciplinary team, whether that is creating a strategic three-year plan or actually trying to create an innovation.

The 3 in the 3-4-5 method stands for three phases. It breaks up any collaborative journey into three phases, a kickoff, a working period, and an ending. During the ending phase, you present what you have achieved by using metrics to determine success, and then you refine it. I strongly believe all projects should have a kickoff where you make pacts and commitments to your goals, and your roles and identify any holes. All projects should also have an ending time because too many projects go on for way too long.

The 4 in the 3-4-5 method refers to 'for', meaning that you have to set the period of time for a certain time. I cannot tell you how many times I have worked with law firms on innovation journeys where they have not (or will not) set an end date. People's capacity for work, especially on work that is separate from their other work, is limited; there is a reason we have four seasons. So, I'm a big believer that any innovation or collaborative project should last 4 months or less. As part of the Progress Principle, we need to be seeing progress and we need to know when it is going to end.

The 5 in the 3-4-5 method is for the five steps that we take all teams through to get them from a problem to a solution.

CCA: What would you say are the biggest pitfalls to achieving an innovative collaborative culture in-house?

DeStefano: I would say that some people think that creating culture equates to softness and that's absolutely not the case. There are situations where we have to be pretty hard-nosed about creating the right culture. Research shows that often when a negative culture arrives within a team, it's one

person's fault and it's called the bad apple theory. But, I believe the fault is not the bad apple, the fault sits with the leader. The leader needs to step in and either remove that person, get them redirected, or move them to a different team, they need to stop the dysfunction from occurring. If leaders do not demonstrate this behavior then people don't trust and they live in either an acrimonious situation or worse yet, they live in what's called artificial harmony; and that's the death knell for a really good culture.

CCA: What is the favorite part of your job?

DeStefano: I love motivating people to change the way they think and the way that they behave.

CCA: What are you seeing from students today and how can general counsel motivate the younger generation?

DeStefano: Students and young lawyers are a group of digital natives who are purpose-driven. Chief Legal Officers need to find a way to empower them by giving them vision and participation in creating the purpose. They need to understand the overarching purpose of their organization, the purpose of the department, as well as the purpose of their team and their projects. Anytime General Counsel can include the why and the purpose for this generation they will find a way to motivate them. Without a clearly defined purpose, they cannot connect. I also think with this new generation, and I think it's true for all of us, if we are going to prosper, we need to find a way to integrate work and life. It is so important for us to figure out how to leverage and integrate what makes us who we are at home and at work, and this next generation of digital natives is insisting on that. generation of digital natives is insisting on that.

CCA: You recently spoke at the [GLL Members Forum Americas](#), what did the theme 'A Journey to Empowerment' mean to you?

Michele DeStefano: One of the key ingredients to leading a successful team is ensuring that we empower the team members. Empowerment can be achieved in many different ways, but it is absolutely essential for engagement and the intrinsic motivation of professionals.

You Might Like

July 08, 2022

[Melio Legal Chief, Former AmEx Exec on Compliance Department's Evolution](#)

By [Phillip Bantz](#)

🕒 7 minute read

July 12, 2022

[Speaking Truth to Power: Creating an Environment for All Voices](#)

By [Alex Lazarus](#)

🕒 5 minute read

May 18, 2022

[The Key to Leadership Success: Behavioral Agility and Creativity](#)

By [Abigail Harris](#)

🕒 3 minute read

July 13, 2022

['They Started Trusting Me More': How Legal Leaders Can Win Over the Rest of the Business](#)

By [Trudy Knockless](#)

🕒 3 minute read

Trending Law Firms This Week

- **Kirkland & Ellis**
25 new blips
- **Jackson Lewis**
17 new blips
- **Latham & Watkins**
17 new blips
- **Morgan & Morgan**
17 new blips
- **Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher**
15 new blips

[Go To Law.com Radar](#)

TRENDING STORIES

[A Top Republican Lawyer Distanced Himself From Trump's Fraud Claims. Why Is He Now Representing Mark Meadows?](#)

LAW.COM PRO

[What to Expect With Mergers, Leverage, Costs, Clients and Morale: Your Questions About](#)

[NATIONAL LAW JOURNAL](#)**[Paul Hastings Anticipates 'Large and Exponential Effect' From Latham Lateral Team](#)**[THE AMERICAN LAWYER](#)**[The 2022 Pro Bono Scorecard: National Rankings](#)**[THE AMERICAN LAWYER](#)**[Ex-Boies Schiller Leader Brings New Boutique to New York](#)**[THE AMERICAN LAWYER](#)**[GC Compensation Chart: Who Made the 2022 Top-Paid GC List?](#)**[CORPORATE COUNSEL](#)**[Am Law 100 Trends Answered](#)****[Where the Am Law 200 Have Risks in a Downturn](#)****[Talking with Talent: Hear What Young Lawyers Really Want](#)****Mentioned in a Law.com story?**

License our industry-leading legal content to extend your thought leadership and build your brand.

[LEARN MORE](#)**FEATURED FIRMS**

Law Offices of Gary Martin Hays & Associates P.C.
(470) 294-1674

Law Offices of Mark E. Salomone
(857) 444-6468

Smith & Hassler
(713) 739-1250

More From ALM

[Resources](#)[CLE Center](#)[Law.com](#) [Compass](#)[Events & Webcasts](#)[Lawjobs](#)[Professional Announcements](#)**[When to Buy a Contract Lifecycle Management \(CLM\) Solution and How to Acquire Budget & Buy-In](#)**

Brought to you by SpotDraft
[Download Now](#) ↓

**[The Real Costs of Full-Time vs. Flexible Lawyers](#)**

Brought to you by Axiom
[Download Now](#) ↓

**[When Do You Really Need the Expense of a Law Firm?](#)**

Brought to you by Axiom
[Download Now](#) ↓

[Go to Resources](#)**Legal Newswire**[Leading Mediation Expert Shares Nine Essential Advocacy Skills for the Next Gene...](#)[Cayman Islands Fintech Funds: Rise, Regulations and Preferred Structures](#)[Sigma Plastics press release on Huff case](#)[The Iron Ladies of Western China](#)[Submit a press release](#)

Sign Up Today and Never Miss Another Story

As a part of your digital membership, you can sign up for an unlimited number of a wide range of complimentary newsletters. Visit your My Account page to make your selections. Get the timely legal news and critical analysis you cannot afford to miss. Tailored just for you. In your inbox. Every day.

[Subscribe to ALM Legal Publications Newsletters](#)

LAW.COM

The industry-leading media platform offering competitive intelligence to prepare for today and anticipate opportunities for future success.



ALM. Copyright © 2022 ALM Global, LLC. All Rights Reserved.