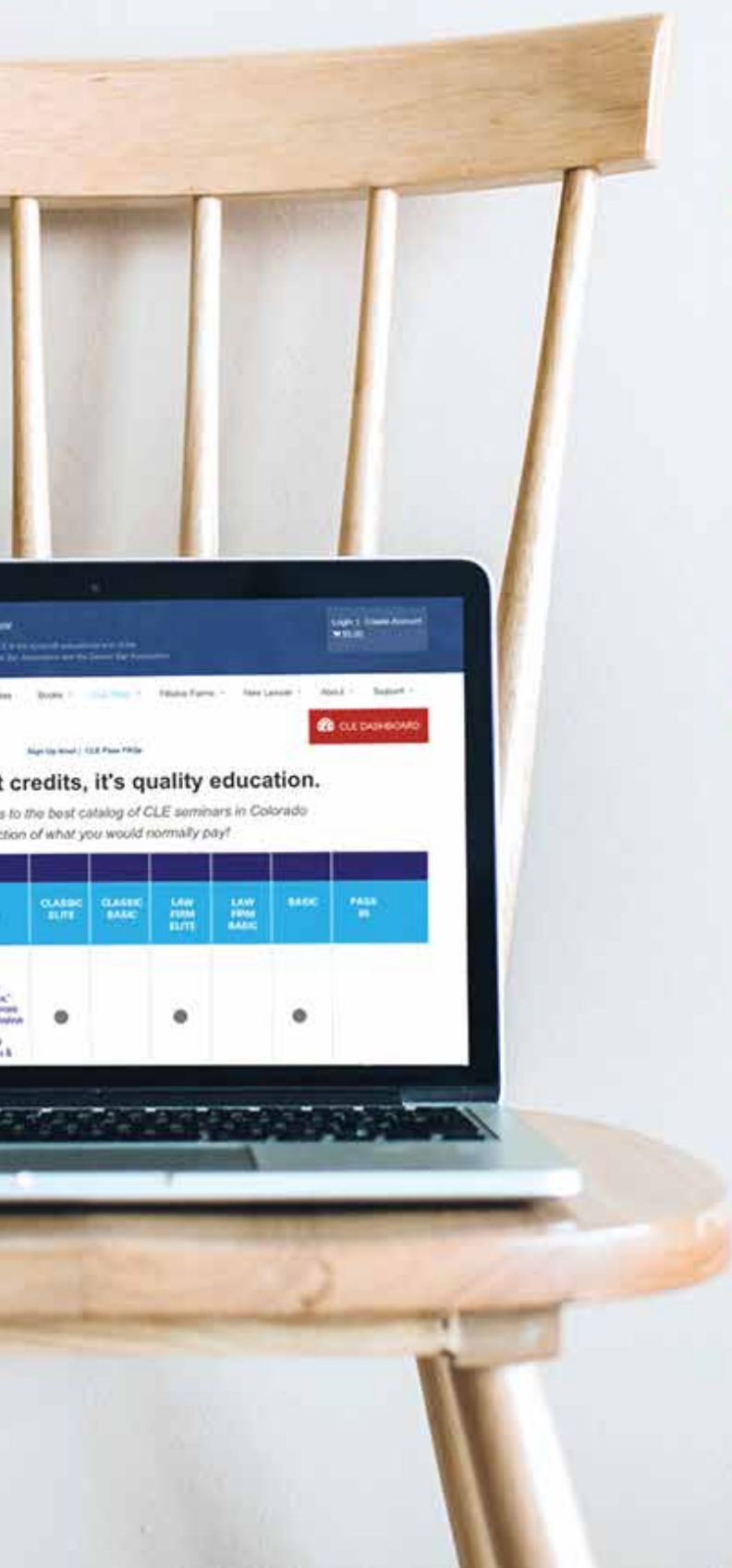


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**ON THE COVER:** Joseph Harrell took this photo at Dream Lake in Rocky Mountain National Park. The snowshoers in the background were making their way to Emerald Lake at the base of the mountain. The photo was taken using a Canon EOS 5D Mark II body, equipped with a EF24-105mm f/4L IS USM lens. Harrell is an attorney with Thomas N. Scheffel & Associates in Denver.

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## Leading Change

Cultivating Agility Through a Dynamic Mindset

BY J. RYANN PEYTON

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**C**hange or Die. Many of us are familiar with this innovator's credo and its unforgiving ultimatum. It

reminds us that we must be willing to embrace change, or at least accept it, because change is an inevitability that keeps our work, our organizations, and ourselves relevant. If the events of the past several years have taught us nothing else, it's that we live and work in a dynamic world. Despite the rule-laden systems and established culture and hierarchies of the legal profession, lawyers too must be dynamic because we do not operate in a world of permanency or stagnation. Yet lawyers have a reputation for being change averse.

We come by this reputation honestly. As people who are trained to see the pitfalls and problems with any new idea, lawyers are sometimes the first to shut down opportunities for change in the name of "protecting" from the unknown. While this may benefit our clients who value our role as devil's advocate, it can also prevent us from serving as change leaders. But to survive in a dynamic environment, lawyers must learn how to incorporate a change mechanism into the culture of our teams, our organizations, and the profession.

### **Change Management Versus Change Leadership**

Change is inevitable. Surviving or responding to change is a reactionary strategy familiar to many of us. It is in this "surviving" of change

that change management happens. Change management is usually reactionary and consists of a linear process, with a single goal and preset checkpoints. "Change management can be seen as an intermittent project, with a discrete beginning and end, addressing one or two big-ticket items, such as restructuring the organization or implementing a new IT system."<sup>1</sup>

Change leadership, on the other hand, is proactive and supports a culture of growth and improvement. Change leaders are adept at "building the desire to change and the acceptance of change into the culture and the values of an organization."<sup>2</sup> Effective change leaders create a vision for the future that inspires others to support change rather than resist or fear it. The vision clearly shows why change is necessary, the benefits of changing, and how people will be affected in their work. This vision ensures that everyone not only understands the benefits of change, but also feels like a part of it and wants to achieve it.

### **The Importance of Agility in Organizational Leadership**

Legal organizations tend to manage change rather than lead it. They want to make big changes, but they want to keep them under control at the same time. Additionally, the hierarchal nature of the legal profession lends itself to prioritizing leader-driven change as opposed to community-led change. The result is a change model that is heavily managed, takes substantial time, and requires leaders at the highest level of an organization or the profession to implement.

While there is a place and time for managed change, change leadership strives to expedite and fine-tune change implementation. With large-scale ambitions, change leadership requires involving all stakeholders who hope to effect positive change. There's a strong need for collaboration and communication among stakeholders—they must be willing and able to work toward a common goal.

The fine-tuning and collaborative nature of change leadership can result in more agile organizations—responsive to the needs of community members, responsive to external factors, and responsive to the organization's mission.

To be successful in this environment of rapid, concurrent, and never-ending change, organizations must grow their change agility not just to thrive but to survive. In fact, senior leaders began acknowledging how important agility is to their success nearly 15 years ago. In a 2008 survey by PricewaterhouseCoopers, 76% of the 1,150 CEOs polled said their ability to adapt to change will be a key source of competitive advantage in the future.<sup>3</sup> In a 2009 study by McKinsey, 9 out of 10 executives said that organizational agility was critical to business success and growing in importance over time.<sup>4</sup> And the Project Management Institute's Organizational Agility Report introduced the following equation: greater organizational agility = better performance = improved competitive advantage.<sup>5</sup>

Agility in change leadership will be the defining attribute of a thriving organization in this modern world. Unfortunately, the legal profession continues to lag in its ability to generate agile change leadership. Lawyers usually do not learn theories of change or the leadership skills needed to understand and effectively execute change programs. Recently, some law firms have begun bringing in change consultants or employing permanent "change" staff, either former lawyers and/or professional managers. Nonetheless, this trend is new and by no means typical across the profession.

So, for legal organizations and the profession to become more agile, lawyers need to improve their capacity for dynamic change leadership within themselves.

### Developing a Dynamic Change Mindset

Organizational agility stems from individual agility. As a result, it is the agile and dynamic mindset of organizational leaders that will ultimately influence the organization's ability to lean into and withstand change. Developing a dynamic change mindset as an individual leader requires moving from a familiar and prudent "reactive" way of problem solving to a "creative" approach to problem solving.

Our brains are socialized to be reactive to other people and outside circumstances. This outside-in way of viewing the world keeps us safe and feeling in control. To shift into a

dynamic change mindset, we must move from a reactive brain to a creative brain and take an inside-out way of engaging with the world that incorporates our authentic selves and core passions and talents.<sup>6</sup> The reactive-to-creative mindset shift is critical to fostering a culture of innovation, collaboration, and value creation that dynamic change leaders generate within their organizations.

According to McKinsey,<sup>7</sup> there are three ways to move from a reactive to a creative mindset:

1. Let go of the need for certainty and instead foster innovation through an approach of discovery. A creative mindset requires us to embrace risk. Lawyers are uniquely risk averse, so adopting a mindset of discovery is a great first step for lawyers who want to become more dynamic in their thinking.
2. Move away from traditional power and leadership hierarchies and foster collaboration. The legal profession is structurally hierarchical, which creates unhelpful power dynamics between leaders and teams and can quash innovation. An approach of partnership rather than authority inherently leads to more agility.
3. Adopt a mindset of abundance. A scarcity mindset keeps us stuck in a false belief that we never have enough—time, money, clients, opportunities, and so on. With its focus on the billable hour and maximum productivity, the legal profession suffers

from a scarcity mindset. It's no wonder when rewards like partnership are scarce, resources are limited, micromanagement abounds, and generally, short-term thinking is the norm. When we assume that we have limited resources, our appetite for risk is inherently limited. Alternatively, a mindset of abundance helps us to see the possibilities that exist and provides us with feelings of clarity, confidence, and capability to create change.

When we can let go of our conditioned way of reacting to the world and to each other through risk taking, collaboration, and abundance, we can shift our collective mindset to be more dynamic and agile, which will in turn allow us to become more effective change leaders.

### Conclusion

Change is one of the only certainties in life. We can either react and manage through change or we can lead through it. Change leaders are in a pivotal role to renew, refresh, and motivate the people around them—and to inspire new beginnings and bridge to the future. While it may not be second nature for lawyers to serve as change leaders, it is possible. Organizational transformation begins with self-transformation. And you might even find that a more agile professional mindset leads to a more agile personal mindset as well. How can you be a change leader for your organization? **CL**

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