



Lessons
in Leadership:

**An Interview
with
Monica Zent**

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Monica Zent



foxwordy

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- *Tell us a bit about yourself and how you came to be in (or a customer of) the legal business?*

I've been in the legal industry over two decades, operating on all sides of it from alternative law firm pioneer, to legal tech founder, to a consumer of legal services for my own business ventures over many years.

- *What do you do for a living right now?*

I do what I love most: wear a number of different hats at the same time. In addition to my writing, public speaking and charitable work, I own or operate various business ventures that I've formed, including leading alternative law firm, ZentLaw, to legal tech company, Foxwordy, to a stealth company in the works.

- *What has been your greatest triumph and your greatest success in the legal services field and what did you learn from each?*

Success and triumph are relative terms, the meaning of which evolves for most of us

over periods of our own life as well. I've achieved successes and triumphs both large and small in the legal industry in conventional terms, of course, such as economic and peer recognition. I would say one of the most rewarding intrinsic successes, however, has been seeing the world's greatest brands in the world purchase products and services offered under business models and businesses that I have created.

- *Do you think the legal industry is headed in the right direction, the wrong direction - or which direction?*

Progress and evolution is always the right direction, in my opinion. The legal industry, although slower than other industries, is certainly moving in that direction. With a greater appetite for innovative business models, business processes and legal technologies, the legal industry is in a position to improve. Certainly, there is major resistance from factions of the legal industry against such changes but as a futurist and an innovator, I suspect those factions will eventually be overcome.

- *Who - or what - inspires you - and why?*

I draw inspiration from many aspects of my life, including people and places. As mentioned, I've always been a futurist, seeing around corners and forming companies or ventures on the cusp of exciting changes that are ahead. My long distance runs are periods when I have time to reflect as well as draw inspiration from the nature that surrounds me. Pioneers and creative thinkers such as Walt Disney, Steve Jobs, Coco Chanel, and Elon Musk provide inspiration. Fearless historical women such as Dr. Sally Ride, Amelia Earhart, and Ada Lovelace who forged new paths in areas where women were once absent have long inspired me.

- *What advice would you give to the younger generation contemplating law as a career?*

The law will always be a part of our society and so will the need for lawyers on some level or another. The law, as a profession in the future, will not look like what it historically has looked like and that's a reality that I believe people should understand before they choose law. I would advise new entrants in the law be well-versed in, and not afraid, of using, creating and leveraging technologies, the essential tools of tomorrow's successful lawyer. I would also suggest people consider the many careers in the law that do not necessarily involve practicing law, such as legal operations, legal marketing, and legal research, should their skills and interests be well-suited to those functions.

- *How ready for change do you think the legal industry is?*

The legal industry fights change. Any of us who have spent time pioneering and

innovating in the law know this firsthand. That said, though, the legal industry is ripe for major change right now. We have hit a powerful inflection point in the law right now where, I predict, the rate of innovation and adoption of innovation in this industry will be greater in the next 5 to 10 years than what we have seen in the past 40. It's definitely an exciting time in the legal industry right now and a great time to be involved in all of this.

- *Is more - or different - leadership required? In what ways?*

Yes. First, as a longtime diversity advocate, I'd like to see greater diversity in the leadership positions in the law. Women still lag behind men when it comes to positions of leadership in BigLaw, on the bench, and as Chief Legal Officers. Ethnic minorities, members of the LGBTI community, veterans and other members of the diversity spectrum are also underrepresented in positions of leadership in the law. Diversity brings a richness of perspectives and experiences the absence of which is, frankly, holding this industry back. Second, I would like to see more tech-oriented, entrepreneurial minds filling leadership roles in the law. When it comes to technology and business process, the legal industry has operated in the dark ages for a very long time. Entrepreneurs and innovators are going to be the ones who bring about amazing new developments in the legal industry.

- *How deep do you think will be the inroads of technology in the industry?*

Very deep. Tech has its foothold in law now and there is no letting it go. Technology is and will continue to have a lasting impact in the law.

- *In ten years, do you see an industry much as it is - or do you see new players, new technology and an altered state?*

In 10 years, I see a legal industry quite different from the one that exists today. I've written and spoken on this before as well. I see new players, evolving players and players rendered obsolete. I envision a place where the law is accessible to everyone on every budget. There will be more tools available to lawyers than ever before to find, analyze, and apply the law. The industry will be more connected and lawyers will collaborate on a powerful level via technology, delivering greater value to their clients in the process. Resources will be shared more freely among lawyers and with clients. I envision the increasing use of other legal professionals to perform many functions in the law that were previously performed by lawyers. I envision a massive rise of the freelance lawyer and legal professional, managed services, and alternative providers taking over much of what was once the purview of BigLaw. I imagine we may see bloated in-house legal departments that keep lawyers specialized in lower value roles than what in-house lawyers previously enjoyed. We'll see today's millennial lawyers rising to leadership positions. I envision a more diverse and balanced legal industry. I envision a thriving legal tech sub-industry within law. And I envision the ability for the average citizen to find and better understand

the law is more accessible and affordable than it ever was.

- *Are consultants and lawyers looking increasingly similar? Should the distinction continue?*

Yes. The distinction makes sense from a licensing and accountability perspective perhaps but I'm not sure the distinction should necessarily continue. There are many occasions, for instance, in which an effective business lawyer can also function as a strategic business consultant.

- *What are your thoughts on the increasing availability of data to guide client-side procurement of legal services?*

The clients that have access to such data can potentially make better decisions about their legal needs and the players best-suited to meet those needs. Unless diversity data is being tracked and considered in those tools, though, I'm not sure it will help to balance out the industry.

- *Lawyers have typically regulated to keep non-lawyer investors out but that's a two-edged sword these days. What are your thoughts?*

It is a dual-edged sword. There are certainly areas in the law in which non-lawyer investors can and should be permitted to have a role and operate. If the goal is to provide legal services that are accessible, affordable and substantively accurate, then there is certainly a case to be made for de-regulating the profession.

- *What's the one most significant factor that will drive change in your view?*

Cultural evolution in the legal industry along with greater adoption of legal technology solutions.

- *Are we seeing the demise of the "profession" and the real emergence of the "business" of law?*

Yes, absolutely. We've already been seeing it.

- *What do you consider is the greatest challenge facing the industry?*

The greatest challenging facing the legal industry is the fact that it cannot seem to get out of its own way.

The legal industry and many of the players in it hinder their own growth and innovation.

- *What do you see as the greatest opportunity for the sector looking forward?*

There are many but perhaps one great opportunity for the industry going forward is to ensure that the law itself and legal assistance is accessible to all of those who need it.

- *Do you think law can improve its track record on diversity and inclusion? How?*

Yes, absolutely. I've spoken and written on this a lot over the years. It has to be a multi-faceted effort that involves (a) reaching out to kids before they enter law school, (b) helping new entrants in the legal profession have access to mentors, resources and opportunities they need to grow, (c) ensuring that there are opportunities for all people on the diversity spectrum to rise in their careers, and (d) most importantly, ensuring that people in leadership positions in the law, both in the public and private sector, reflect the diverse global and national community in which we live and work.

Colleagues at the Urban Debate League are doing interesting things along the lines of point (a). Colleagues at the various diversity bar associations throughout the country, including the National Bar Association, which I'm proud to say has partnered with Foxwordy, are doing interesting things to foster diversity along the lines of points (b) and (c). Colleagues such as those at the Institute for Inclusion in the Legal Professions (IILP) are providing valuable information and research around the diversity picture in this industry.

As for the legal tech sector, diversity is dismal and much work is needed there. I'd like to see fellow writers, industry influencer and publishers lead the charge on helping to foster and support diversity in the legal tech community and I'm working with some great colleagues in legal tech on those fronts.

- *Will the current regulatory framework around law help or hinder it in the future?*

I believe it hinders much of the evolution in the industry that needs to happen.

- *Who do you think are the greatest influencers on the industry these days?*

Well, you certainly are one of them! I would say there are a handful of fellow legal tech entrepreneurs and certain credible, responsible, thought leaders out there writing and speaking about these ideas.

- *If you had to do it all over again, would you? Or what would you do differently?*

Hindsight is 20/20. There are many things we might all do differently in business with the benefit of hindsight. I probably would have launched another company in another industry before circling back to law. The legal industry takes a long time to evolve. As

an entrepreneur, I don't have a ton of patience. Except for the alternative law firm, my other companies were not in law. In other industries, you are able to vet out prototypes, test, assess and tweak or iterate rapidly. While you can still do that in law, the findings may not be accurate because the industry itself moves so slowly. I have also found the law and many people in it to be counterproductive to innovation or to acceptance of entrepreneurs and those bringing new and interesting solutions to the table. The law could learn a thing or two from other industries.

- *If a law firm was a startup pitching for investors, would you be an investor?*

No.

Wildcard questions:

- *If you weren't doing this, what would you be doing?*
I'd be an astronaut.
- *What would you like to be known for?*
In the legal industry, that I was an innovator in the law and one of the early women leading the legal tech revolution.

In general, that I was a good person who inspired people to achieve their dreams and be their best every day.
- *What would surprise everyone if they knew (they may now).*
I've been an endurance athlete for over 20 years and counting.
- *What's your favorite hobby or activity outside of law?*
Being with my children.
- *What's your favorite sports team?*
I don't watch sports but if I must, it's basketball. Only basketball. Golden State Warriors.
- *What's your favorite city?*
Paris
- *What's your favorite food?*
Chocolate
- *What's your nickname - and why?*
Mo (short for Monica).

Monica Zent, founder of ZentLaw, is an attorney, businesswoman, entrepreneur and a pioneer. When Monica saw a market that was ripe for improvement and in need of healthy competition, she envisioned a new business model. In 2002, Monica re-engineered the law firm as we know it to create ZentLaw. By merging the efficiencies and flexibility of outsourcing with the best attributes of a law firm, ZentLaw offers a better way to practice for attorneys and a winning proposition for clients.

Monica draws on her business background in her practice as a highly skilled drafter and negotiator in the commercial transactions and licensing arenas. She has extensive experience with all types of commercial transactions, government contracting, and intellectual property law and licensing in a wide variety of industries. She is an experienced and versatile attorney advising some of the world's most well-known brands on such matters as their new product launches, key transactions, or e-commerce and social media offerings. Monica has also pioneered the drafting and structure of certain transactions of first impression in the country in such industries as mobile, solar and biotech.

The syndicated "Legal Minute" series that Monica created and hosts affords legal insight for audiences from California to New York, and she is often asked to comment on legal issues for other radio and television programs.

Monica is an entrepreneur, having launched companies in media, real estate and internet verticals. She has actively donated her time and talent to many causes over the years such as the East Palo Alto Community Law Project, California Lawyers for the Arts, and educational initiatives. She has served on the Board of Directors of local organizations such as the Hispanic Foundation of Silicon Valley and is active in a variety of charitable causes and foundations.



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