



The Lawyer's Relevance in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

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Introduction

The legal profession has always been about people: lawyers, apprentices, clerks, paralegals. This tribe has produced independent-minded advocates who speak without fear or favour for those they represent, shaping justice through intellect and conviction.

Yet, the rise of artificial intelligence (AI), particularly large language models (LLMs), challenges this proposition. LLMs promise speed, coherence, and breadth, generating summaries, clauses, or full briefs with a few prompts, albeit with risks of hallucination. Clients can now produce documents faster and compare them to their lawyers' work, raising a critical question: why is a lawyer relevant and more precisely, what type of lawyer is relevant?

This question extends to the support systems modern law firms must build. As AI reshapes the legal landscape, does it sharpen the lawyer's mind or soften it? In Singapore, where the legal profession is globally respected, tightly regulated, and fiercely competitive, this issue is particularly pressing.

The Type of Lawyer

The law has always been shaped by thinkers. Great lawyers, those who appear before the court or command the boardroom, are often great minds first.

Historically, they relied on reference tools like Halsbury's Laws and Lloyd's Law Reports. These were scaffolds not substitutes. Legal thinking was never outsourced to the books, it was refined through them. These lawyers relied on tools but never abandoned critical thought, embodying the principle that reliance does not mean surrender of

intellect. Their ability to lead extended beyond law, positioning them as statesmen and changemakers.

It is no coincidence that many of the world's great national leaders were lawyers trained in logic, persuasion, and decision making. From Lincoln to Mandela, Lee Kuan Yew to Singapore's current Home Minister K. Shanmugam. These were men shaped by legal thinking but called to larger arenas because of it.

AI does not threaten such lawyers, it amplifies them. LLMs expose those who merely repeat precedent, while elevating those prepared to think deeply.

In the past, clients rarely accessed Halsbury's or raw case law, but today, they can ask AI to summarise arguments needed to win a case and evaluate their lawyer's advice against it.

The Modern Legal Tribe

The question of relevance extends to the law firm's support system: the tribe.

To thrive in the AI era, firms must focus on their core strengths and the unique abilities of their people. Like a Roman garrison, where shield bearers formed an impenetrable front, supported by water carriers, scouts, and generals, a law firm succeeds when each member's role is optimised.

Not everyone is a scout (business development specialist), hunter (advocate), or craftsman (drafter). The tribe's strength lies in its diversity, enabling the hunter to tackle the mammoth, billion dollar disputes, while supported by guides, cooks and logisticians (the firm's ecosystem). Without the tribe, the hunter can only bring back a deer.



AI's Role and the Need for Training

AI challenges traditional support roles, which were often reactive, task driven, and hierarchical. The legal assistant who types quickly is now outpaced by speech to text software. The paralegal who formats bundles competes with AI platforms that sort, label, and index in seconds.

Yet, relevance is not about replacement, it is about reinvention.

An executive assistant who remembers clients by name, who anticipates preferences and manages key relationships, is no longer a fictional Donna from Suits. He or she is an expectation. This is good for meritocracy, for social mobility, and for the firm.

Legal associates now spend less time drafting from scratch and more time refining AI generated documents. While AI produces coherent drafts, it cannot challenge assumptions or apply contextual judgment, skills Associates must master.

AI does not mentor, mark up work, or provoke better thinking. It simply produces. This places the onus on firm leaders to build tribes that foster excellence and a team that cannot be replaced when it is time to hunt the mammoth.

Navigating Disruption

AI driven disruption is already here.

In 2025, Microsoft laid off 22 legal counsel and five paralegals in Washington State, part of broader cuts as companies adopted hybrid models, reducing in house legal teams while relying on contract counsel and AI assisted operations. These shifts signal a critical moment for law firms to act.

This is not collapse. It is evolution.

The useful analogy is aviation. Modern aircraft are flown largely on autopilot. It manages fuel, altitude, navigation. But when weather turns or engines stall, the machine disengages and the pilot takes over.

So too with lawyers.

AI can draft, bundle, even model arguments. But only the lawyer can say: "This is the right call." Only the lawyer can bear the risk of that decision.

The real danger is not that we use autopilot. It is that we forget how to fly.

In aviation, pilots are required to log manual flying hours. In law, we must do the same purposefully.

Because a lawyer who stops thinking, arguing, and reasoning from first principles eventually forgets how.

The entire tribe must answer the same question: Am I adding value beyond what the tool can do? If the answer is yes, the tribe becomes not obsolete but a force multiplier.



Conclusion

I believe AI will free up those who are capable of deep thinking and create more efficient law firms. And this will, ultimately, enhance access to justice.

I do not think AI will replace lawyers. As Shakespeare quipped: “The first thing we do, let’s kill all the lawyers.” Yet here we are, surviving empires, economic collapse, and now we will survive AI.

So the question is not whether AI will replace us. It is whether we still remember why we matter.

At my firm, we have embraced this moment as an opportunity to reimagine what a modern law firm should look like.

We are building a tribe. Each person plays to their strengths. Each is supported by AI where it matters, and by people where it counts.

Like pilots who train with autopilot but never forget how to fly, our lawyers use AI to accelerate but never abdicate thinking.

This article was authored by our Managing Partner, [Bazul Ashhab](#). Recognised as one of Singapore’s and the region’s top dispute resolution lawyers, he leads the firm’s Litigation and International Arbitration Practice Areas. An expert in court litigation, international arbitration, and cross-border mediation, Bazul has acted in high-value and complex disputes for high-net-worth individuals, major financial institutions, and global corporations. Notably, he led a team that secured a landmark US\$5 billion freezing order in Singapore. Appointed as an Ambassador to the Singapore International Mediation Centre, his career reflects the firm’s core value of Evolution with Intent, driving purposeful outcomes for clients while contributing to society through his support for financially disadvantaged students.