



Harnessing the Power of Subject Matter Expertise

Be a catalyst for legal excellence and influence: become a subject matter expert. Leverage your knowledge and influence to benefit the entire legal community.

BY THERESA ELLIOTT

In the realm of law, where knowledge reigns supreme and expertise is revered, the role of a subject matter expert (SME) extends far beyond individual success and becomes a beacon of inspiration and influence for the entire legal community. This article delves into the transformative power of being an SME, highlighting how learning serves as a business asset and how expertise contributes to shaping a legacy that transcends the confines of individual careers.

Gone are the days when continuing legal education (CLE) and research were mere checkboxes on a to-do list. Instead, they stand as invaluable assets that not only enhance lawyers' capabilities as legal professionals but also reassure clients that they have the best and brightest legal champions on their team. By investing in learning and staying abreast of current research, law changes, and case studies, lawyers position themselves as trusted advisors equipped to navigate even the most complex legal challenges. Becoming a recognized SME among peers is the pinnacle of achievement in the legal world.

At the heart of this transformation lies the concept of subject matter expertise. Being recognized as an SME by peers is not just a badge of honor; it is the highest form of praise in the legal community. This recognition transcends geographical boundaries, extending from local circles to statewide and national platforms. As SMEs, lawyers wield influence and inspire others to know more and be more. Lawyers' expertise becomes a resource that benefits the entire legal ecosystem, driving excellence and innovation at every turn.

But the impact of being an SME goes beyond personal accolades. It is a catalyst for positive change within the legal community. By teaching and mentoring others, lawyers contribute

to the professional development of future generations of lawyers. Lawyers' guidance and insights not only elevate the skills of other lawyers but also foster a culture of continuous improvement that improves outcomes for clients and strengthens the integrity of the legal system.

Moreover, being an SME enables lawyers to shape a legacy. Lawyers' contributions to the legal community become a part of collective knowledge and expertise, influencing and inspiring generations of lawyers to come. By viewing learning as an asset and embracing the role of SMEs, lawyers leave a legacy of excellence and influence that continues to inspire and shape the legal profession long after a lawyer's days of practicing law are behind.



Theresa Elliott is the director of professional development at the State Bar of Wisconsin. She previously worked with continuing education programs for architects, engineers, insurance agents, and lawyers. Throughout the year, she will share tips and techniques on how attorneys, paralegals, and judges can turn the chore of fulfilling CLE requirements into a business strategy. Access the digital article at www.wisbar.org/wl.

telliott@wisbar.org



Continuous Learning is Key

Becoming recognized as an SME requires dedication, continuous learning, and a commitment to staying at the forefront of your field. Here are some steps you can take to position yourself as an SME.

1) Stay Hungry for Knowledge.

Cultivate an appetite for the latest information and developments in your practice area and related fields. Make it a habit to regularly consume legal publications, journals, blogs, and industry news sources to stay informed about emerging trends, case law updates, and regulatory changes.

2) Prioritize Learning. Make learning a top priority for yourself and your team. Allocate dedicated time for professional development activities such as attending seminars, workshops, webinars, and conferences. Encourage your team members to pursue relevant certifications and advance training opportunities.

3) Expand Expertise Across Practice Areas.

While concentrating in a specific practice area is important, don't limit yourself to just one area of law. Broaden your expertise by staying current with development in other practice areas. This interdisciplinary approach enhances your understanding of legal issues and allows you to offer comprehensive solutions to clients.

4) Utilize Resources. Equip yourself and your staff with tools and resources that facilitate continuous learning and up-to-date research. Invest in subscriptions that provide 24/7 CLE or research, such as the State Bar of Wisconsin's UPass and Books Unbound library for your comprehensive research.

5) Contribute to Knowledge Sharing.

Consider sharing your expertise with others by becoming an author or speaker. Write articles for legal publications, contribute to chapters in legal books, or participate as a speaker at

CLE programs and conferences. Sharing your insights and experiences not only enhances your visibility but also establishes you as a thought leader in your field.

6) Commit to Lifelong Learning.

Recognize that learning is a continuous journey, not a destination. Commit to being a lifelong learner by embracing new challenges, seeking out mentorship opportunities, and actively participating in professional development activities throughout your career.

The power of subject matter expertise is not just about individual achievement; it is about leveraging knowledge and influence to benefit the entire legal community. Together, lawyers can harness the transformative power of expertise to propel the legal profession to new heights of excellence and impact.

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