



BY JORDAN FURLONG

Three Core Attributes of Tomorrow's Lawyers





To carry out their future roles in both commerce and society, I believe lawyers will need to possess these three attributes: legal intuition, professional integrity, and personal trustworthiness.

My current preoccupation with the “future of law” comes down to three questions:

- 1) What will lawyers be called upon to do in the post-AI, post-chaos world?
- 2) Which features and characteristics will lawyers need to meet this future demand?
- 3) How do we build a new professional formation system to develop such lawyers?

I've written extensively in answer to the first question. As legal task performance shifts from humans to machines, lawyers will have to “level up” and develop higher-grade, higher-stakes services to clients and society, expressed primarily through advice, advocacy, and accompaniment.

These days, I'm mostly immersed in the second question: Based on what should be more complex, critical, human-centered demand for lawyers' services – in both private/commercial and public/societal dimensions – who must lawyers be in future, and what properties must they possess, in order to successfully meet that demand?

As part of this effort, I've identified a number of key roles that lawyers will play in future, as well as a series of critical capacities that will enable lawyers' performance of those roles. I'll explore these in more detail in future publications.

But underlying all those functions and capacities are what I would call *three fundamental attributes* required of future lawyers – three core elements of their personality, training, and temperament – without which lawyers will fail to meet the needs of their clients or of society. I'm sharing them with you here as part of a larger work in progress, and I'd be interested in your take on them.

To carry out their future roles in both commerce and society, I believe lawyers will need to possess these three attributes.

- **Legal Intuition:** The ability to instinctively identify and analyze the legal considerations and implications of a situation, by means of tacit legal

knowledge and sound legal judgment.

- **Professional Integrity:** The ability to consistently conduct oneself in an honest, honorable, and responsible manner, by means of strong character and strict adherence to ethical principles.

- **Personal Trustworthiness:** The ability to effectively form trusted relationships that advance the interests and dignity of others, enabled through personal commitment and steadfast reliability.

Here's a deeper dive into each one.

Legal Intuition

It's one thing to simply learn the law – anyone with a law degree can say they've done that. But a good lawyer should be able almost to *sense* the law, to notice the presence of a legal element and understand its potential implications without needing someone to openly draw attention to it. That's legal intuition: knowledge of the law so deep-seated that it manifests as a kind of “legal radar,” detecting the presence of legal issues in the vicinity and prompting the lawyer to act.

At more advanced levels, legal intuition can sometimes seem like magic to an untrained observer; for example, the trial lawyer who not only can immediately identify a hearsay statement in testimony, but who can almost *anticipate* the statement in advance. That's the “intuition” – the ingrained ability to notice a legal issue and see its implications at an almost subconscious level.

Some of the legal knowledge that new lawyers should be able to deploy confidently and proactively would include:

- What would prevent the admission of evidence
- What constitutes and breaks a chain of causation
- What are the necessary elements of criminal conduct
- What constitute the terms and the breach of a contract
- What entitles someone to own or sell an item of property



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- What are the fundamental rights afforded to a person in a jurisdiction

But legal intuition also operates as a set of intellectual habits of mind unique to the law. How do you interpret a statute or a contract? What meets a standard of reasonableness, and why? How do you use previously decided cases to analyze a current one? Most lawyers developed the capacity to answer these questions in their first months of law school, even if they can't recall exactly when or how. When we talk about the ability to "think like a lawyer," this is most of what we mean.

In the post-artificial intelligence (AI) legal sector, however, an additional feature will enter these lists: "How do you evaluate the validity and effectiveness of a legal instrument?" To the extent new lawyers will have any capacity to add value to a legal business, it will lie in their ability to painstakingly review an AI-generated contract, statement of claim, or other legal document to ensure the accuracy of its content, the acceptability of its format, and the furtherance of the client's objective.

Professional Integrity

Repeatedly invoked but rarely defined, "integrity" appears in almost all Codes of Professional Conduct as well



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as in many pious speeches about the inherent virtue of the legal profession. Integrity includes soundness of moral character, trustworthiness, and fidelity to both people and ethical principles. A person who acts honestly and honorably, who remains true to their promises, and who routinely upholds standards of good conduct displays integrity.

Amateur anthropologists are free to argue over whether some humans innately possess integrity and others inherently lack it. For myself, I consider integrity to be a *choice*, one that becomes easier to make by training yourself to fully develop whatever natural tendency towards moral uprightness you might possess.

Vanishingly few people are born with so much natural virtue that acting with integrity comes as easily to them as breathing. The rest of us have to work at it, overcoming the equally natural temptation to make an exception this time, to go along to get along, to keep a little extra something for ourselves. The lawyer formation systems of the future will have to develop in aspiring lawyers first the skill and then the habit of choosing to act with integrity.

The canons of legal ethics and professional responsibility are valuable tools here. Codes of Conduct direct lawyers to act honorably towards the courts, their clients, and each other, and to place truthfulness above all other considerations; legal ethics help lawyers understand how to act with integrity inside the complex shades of real-world legal practice. A lawyer who follows the dictates of their conscience, but ignores the directions of legal ethics, has misunderstood this foundational attribute of good lawyering. It's not either/or, it's both.

Trustworthiness, fidelity, and soundness of character are hardly unique to lawyers; every profession requires integrity of its members, as do many technical guilds. But there is no other profession in which the presence of integrity is so foundational and its absence irreversibly fatal, and in which

standards of integrity are expressed with such clarity and detail in written form. Choosing to do the right thing – and being able to identify what the right thing is – constitute foundational features of being a lawyer.

Personal Trustworthiness

Technical skills, as I wrote a couple of years ago,¹ are the techniques and tools required to perform practical tasks, while "relational skills" manifest more human qualities like empathy and care, through activities such as listening, collaborating, exercising judgment, and showing discretion.

Lawyers learn the technical skills of this profession throughout law school and continue to hone them in practice and in continuing legal education (CLE) programs. But relational legal skills are all but ignored in lawyer formation and are difficult to acquire through post-graduate training. This was already an unfortunate shortfall of lawyer formation before AI, but it's going to be a fatal vulnerability after it.

Lawyers are slowly coming to recognize the hard reality that generative AI (GenAI) inevitably will take charge² of most lawyer tasks that involve technical skills. But they are largely unaware that AI can handle tasks that involve relational skills too.³ An LLM sufficiently advanced – and we are very close to one – could easily deliver what feels like heartfelt counsel or lend what seems to be a sympathetic ear to an unhappy client.

"People will never seek important personal experiences from an impersonal machine," I keep hearing. But we can't assume that will always be the case. Younger generations raised on screens and texting might be perfectly happy asking for guidance from a large language model (LLM) calibrated to their personality and situation. There's no "human moat" around the legal profession that will fully protect lawyers from the potential reach of GenAI – with maybe one exception.



The killer feature for humans, when competing with AI on relational matters, is their personal *trustworthiness*. A person might consider an AI to be trustworthy, if they also trust its corporate designer to prioritize that person's best interests, to keep their information confidential, and to demonstrate fidelity in all their dealings with them. Personally, I wouldn't trust any AI designer as far as I could throw them in that regard.

But a person can and will trust another person on all these points – if that person proves themselves worthy of that trust. Through repeated demonstrations of judgment, concern, and discretion, a lawyer can gradually build a client relationship that's founded upon the lawyer's personal reliability. I suspect that for the legal profession, the whole post-AI ballgame is going to come down to trustworthiness – the capacity to consistently and

legitimately earn the trust of other people, and to form and maintain a relationship built on that trust through good times and bad.

Conclusion

Legal intuition, professional integrity, and personal trustworthiness will be the essential building blocks of the future legal profession. It's not that lawyers don't require or possess these qualities now – it's that we don't intentionally and systematically develop these attributes in lawyers, because we haven't explicitly made them the *foundation of lawyer purpose and identity*. That has to change.

Today's legal profession was built on the twin pillars of legal expertise and technical skill. But GenAI is going to topple these pillars and displace lawyers from most of the tasks their expertise and skills allowed them to perform. To serve future needs beyond those AI can

meet, lawyers will require a new foundation that puts their *humanity* at the center of who they are and what they do.

And I think everything important about lawyers' humanity can be expressed through their legal intuition, their professional integrity, and their personal trustworthiness. How about you? **WL**

ENDNOTES

¹Furlong, Jordan, *The Rise of the "Human Skills" Lawyer*; <https://jordanfurlong.substack.com/p/the-rise-of-the-human-skills-lawyer>.

²Furlong, Jordan, *The Divergence of Law Firms From Lawyers*; <https://jordanfurlong.substack.com/p/the-divergence-of-law-firm-from-lawyers>.

³Furlong, Jordan, *Stewardship and the Post-AI Legal Profession*; <https://jordanfurlong.substack.com/p/trusted-oversight-a-role-for-the>. **WL**

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After 33 years as a faculty member at UW-Madison, I can say that I really believe in this university. My legacy gift is designated for the Department of Psychology and the Department of Gender and Women's Studies, because I know what remarkable work each one does.

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