

Webinar Recap: Lessons Learned at The MPF 2026 Leadership Conference

The Managing Partner Forum's May 2026 *Law Firm of the Future* webinar, #68 in the series, brought together two experienced firm leaders to reflect on insights and data from the MPF 2026 Leadership Conference, held May 6-7 in Atlanta. Both webinar guests bring Big Law backgrounds: Crissy came through Paul Hastings and McKenna Long & Aldrich before joining Krevolin & Horst, where she serves as one of three co-managing partners. Roger founded Barton LLP and has grown it from three lawyers to a 45-attorney firm with offices in New York, Nashville, and Los Angeles.

Panelists:

- [Cristiane R. Wolfe](#): Co-Managing Partner at [Krevolin & Horst](#)
- [Roger E. Barton](#): Founder and Managing Partner of [Barton LLP](#)

Moderators:

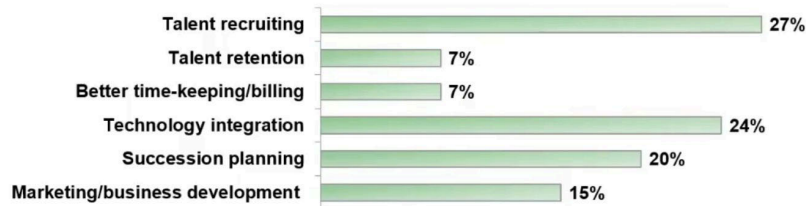
- [John Remsen Jr](#): President of [TheRemsenGroup](#), President & CEO of Managing Partner Forum
- [Uri Gutfreund](#): Senior Vice President and Managing Principal at [Ames & Gough](#)

Key takeaways:

- **AI has moved from background noise to front-burner priority**, but most firms remain in “balanced, evolving” mode without committing to a clear direction.
- **Talent recruiting and technology integration are now deeply intertwined**, and younger lawyers are arriving with AI expectations already baked in.
- **Policies exist at most firms, but oversight and training lag**; 41% of firms provide no formal AI training at all.
- **The top concern about AI** has shifted from hallucinations and confidentiality to the long-term development of young lawyers.
- **Proactive client conversations about AI are no longer optional**; some clients are beginning to specify which tools their outside firms must use

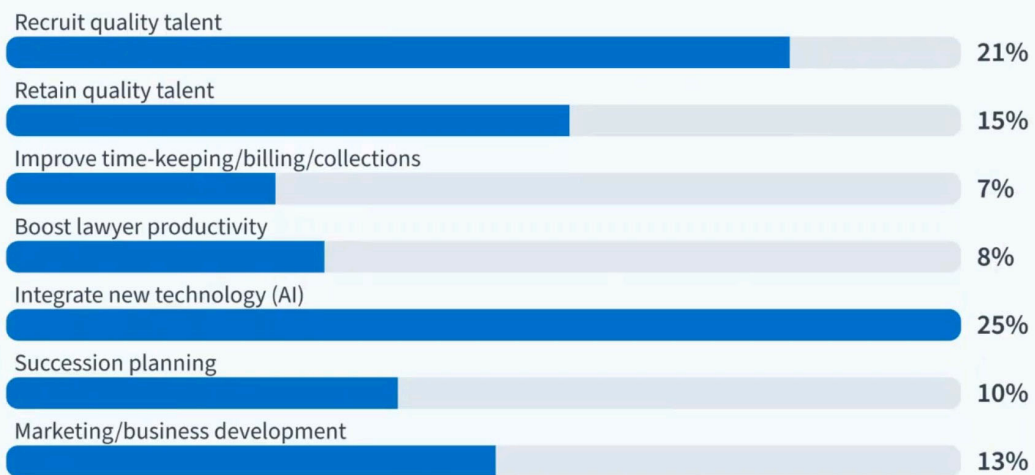
Bringing on the Data!

REGISTRANT QUESTION #1
From the list below, what is your firm's top priority in 2026?



Registrant Question #1: What is your firm's top priority in 2026?

From the list below, what are your Firm's TOP TWO PRIORITIES for 2026?



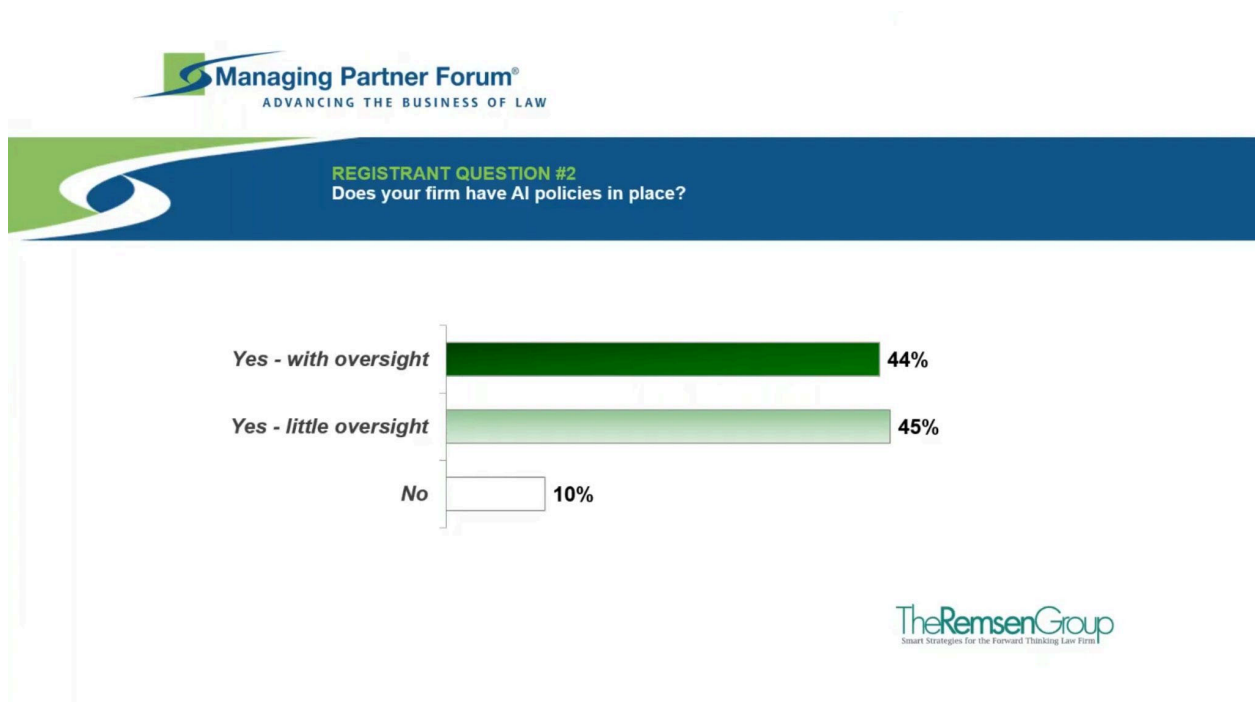
Conference Poll: Top two firm priorities for 2026 (Atlanta attendees)

A pre-registration poll of today's 75 attendees put talent recruiting first at 27%, followed by technology integration at 24% and succession planning at 20%. In the Atlanta conference data, technology and AI integration led at 25% with recruiting at 21%.

Crissy noted succession planning has dropped lower than she would expect, suggesting either AI has crowded it out or perhaps that MPF programming has helped firms make genuine progress. Roger called this the first year a genuinely new technology category has gained real traction in legal practice, since prior conversations centered on cybersecurity and billing tools. Generative AI is different in scope.

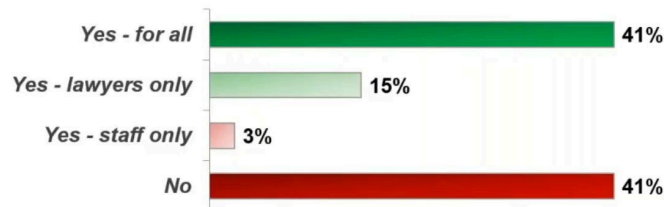
On recruiting, both panelists said their processes remain largely traditional. Roger said Barton LLP targets laterals from large firms for training and pedigree, then meets candidates where they are on technology rather than screening for proficiency. Crissy flagged a retention dimension already emerging: younger lawyers trained on AI-integrated research tools in law school will arrive expecting access to them. Firms that cannot provide that will face a growing disadvantage.

AI Policies, Oversight & Training



Registrant Question #2: Does your firm have AI policies in place?

REGISTRANT QUESTION #3
Does your firm provide formal training for its lawyers and/or support staff?



Registrant Question #3: Does your firm provide formal training for its lawyers and/or support staff?

89% of today's attendees have some form of AI policy, but only 44% pair it with meaningful oversight. Both panelists described similar frameworks, i.e. policies grounded in existing ethical obligations, technology committees vetting tools, and openness to associates experimenting, as long as client data stays protected. Roger noted that no firm at the conference is signing technology contracts longer than one year.

Uri's position on risk management was firm: the tools change, but the obligations do not. Confidentiality, supervision, accuracy, and billing ethics remain fully in force regardless of what generated the work product. Around 23 to 24 states have promulgated formal AI rules, and the duty of competence now includes a reasonable level of AI proficiency.

The training data was stark: 41% of firms provide no formal AI training at all. Crissy argued the most valuable training investment right now is prompt engineering, or teaching lawyers how to ask generative AI the right questions. AI is designed to please, which means it will produce what a user wants to hear rather than what is accurate. Lawyers need to approach AI output critically, not with automatic trust.

The MPF 2026 Leadership Conference



MAY 6-7, 2026
ATLANTA, GA

THE MPF 2026 LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

Leadership Beyond the Status Quo

Future-Proofing Your Firm with AI and Strategy

The MPF 2026 Leadership Conference - May 6-7, 2026, Atlanta, GA



Conference Participants

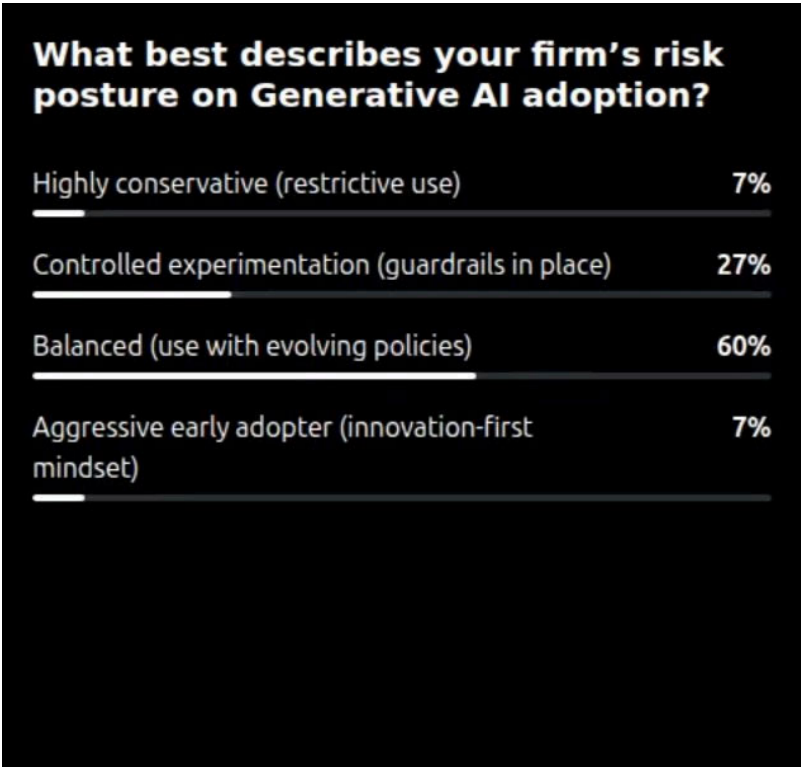
- **125** managing partners and firm leaders
- Leading firms with **3-330** lawyers
- **28** US states, **3** Canadian provinces, DC, BWI
- **67%** of you have been here before

TheRemsenGroup

MPF 2026 Conference participants

The conference drew 125 managing partners from firms ranging from 3 to 330 lawyers, representing 28 US states, three Canadian provinces, DC, and the British West Indies. 67% percent were returning attendees, and many brought next-generation leaders with them. Roger described the collaboration as the strongest he has seen. AI is a challenge every firm is tackling simultaneously, which created unusual openness compared to prior years when topics like succession or compensation were more firm-specific.

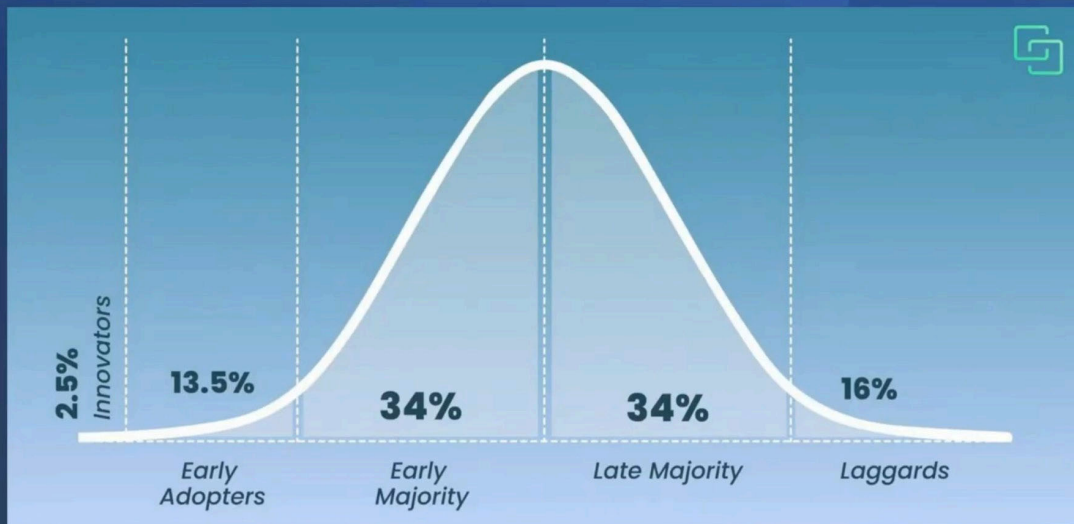
Generative AI Adoption & Risk Posture



Live Poll: What best describes your firm's risk posture on generative AI adoption?

A live poll on generative AI risk posture showed that 60% described themselves as balanced with evolving policies, 27% reported controlled experimentation with guardrails, and 7% each fell into the highly conservative and aggressive early adopter categories. Roger predicted the balanced result; the phrase he heard most in Atlanta was “first to be second.”

The Rogers Adoption Curve

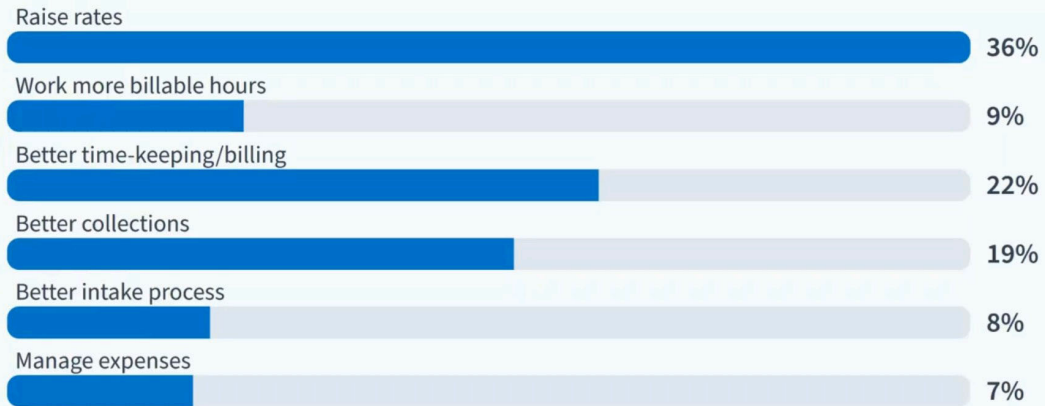


The Rogers Adoption Curve

John used the [Rogers Adoption Curve](#) to make the stakes plain: in three years, there will be lawyers who know how to use these tools well and lawyers who do not. Mid-sized firms have a structural advantage, with fewer decision makers and more agility to move faster than larger competitors.

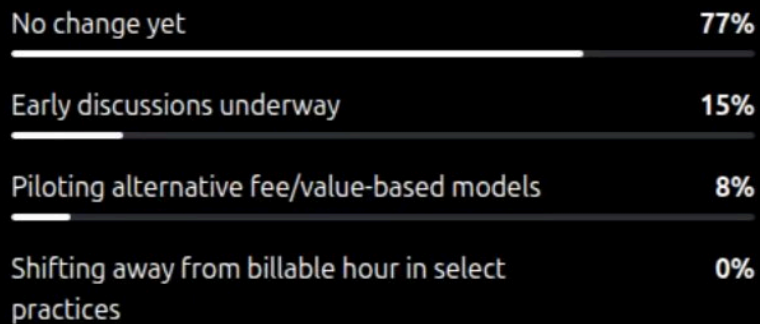
Profitability, Pricing & Client Dynamics

From the list below, what are the TOP TWO STRATEGIES your Firm has deployed to improve profitability in 2026?

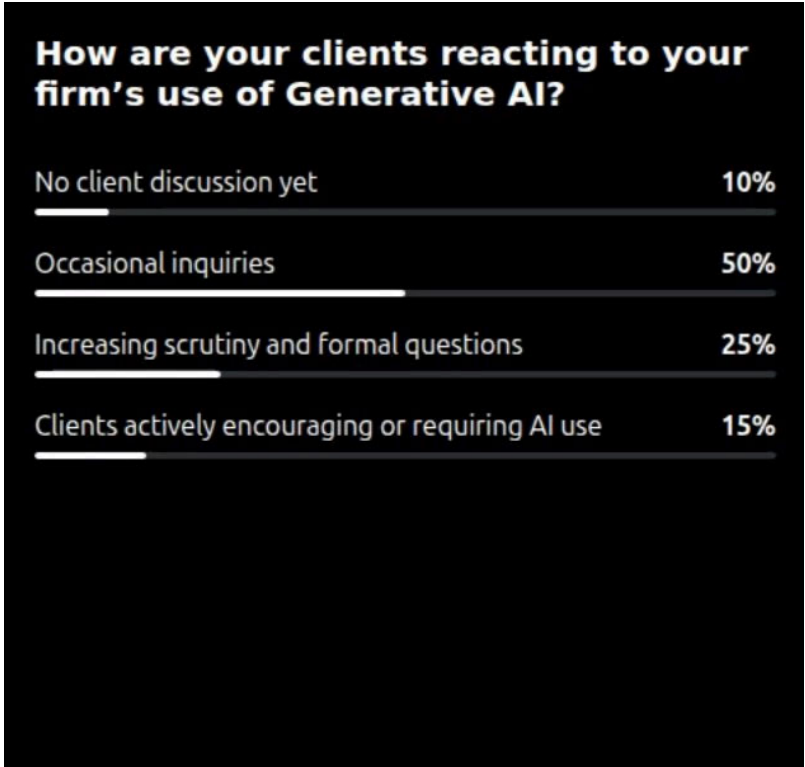


Conference Poll: Top two strategies to improve profitability in 2026

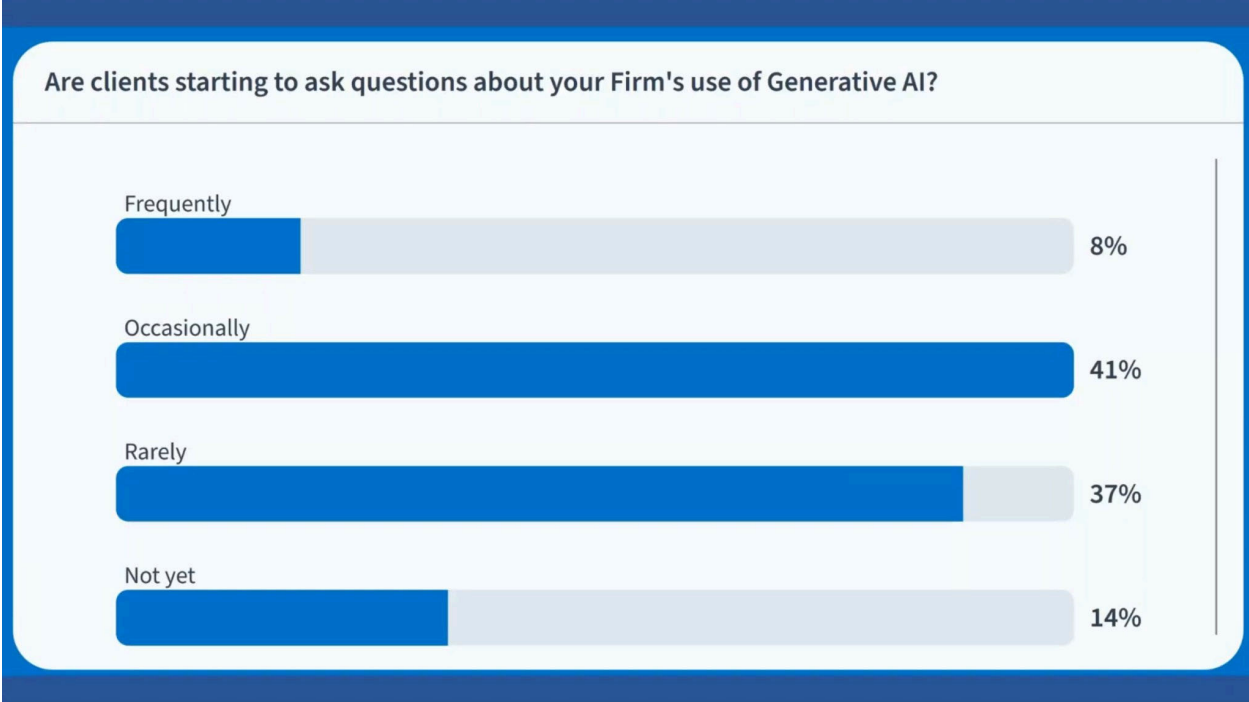
How is Generative AI influencing your firm's approach to pricing legal services?



Live Poll: How is generative AI influencing your firm's approach to pricing legal services?



Live Poll: How are your clients reacting to your firm's use of generative AI?



Conference Poll: Are clients starting to ask questions about your firm's use of generative AI?

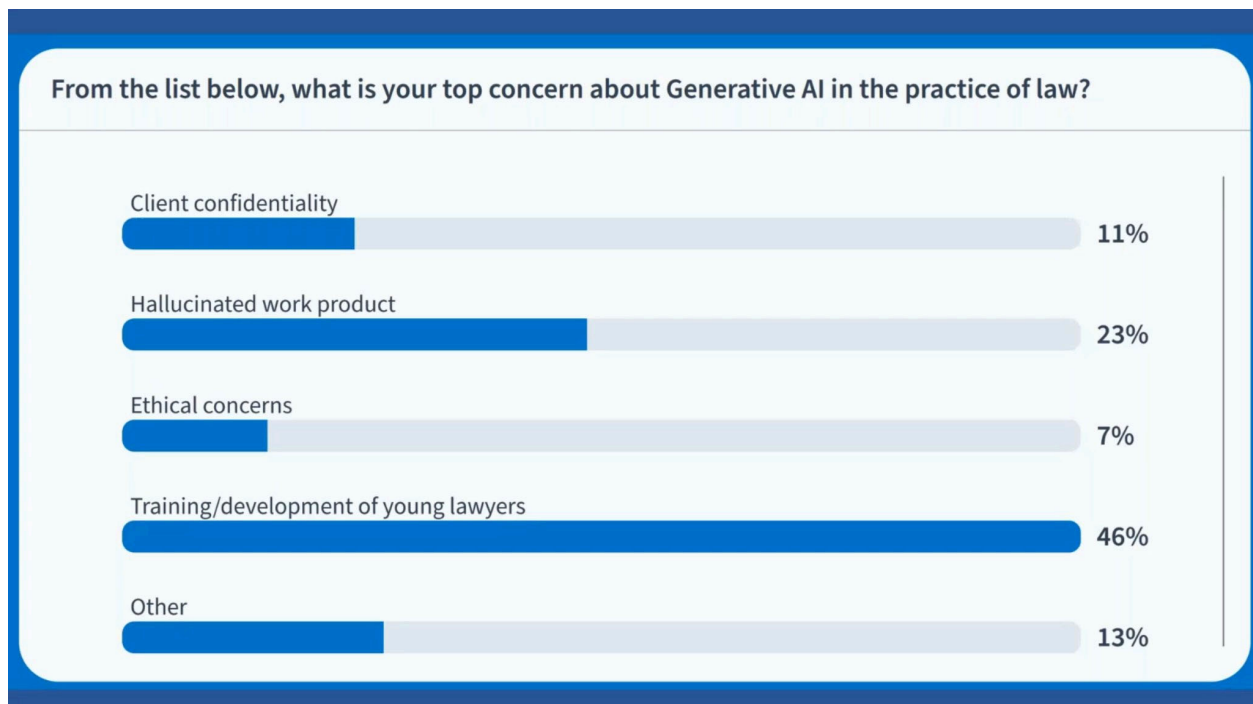
Conference data showed raising rates as the most common profitability strategy at 36%, followed by better timekeeping and billing at 22% and better collections at 19%. Roger pushed back on the emphasis on rates, arguing that timekeeping, billing, and collections disciplines are significantly underutilized (“There’s gold in our hills,” he quipped) and that AI billing overlays were among the more discussed conference tools for capturing it.

A live poll showed 77% of attendees report no change in how they price services, with 15% in early discussions and 8% piloting alternative fee models. On client dynamics, 50% are fielding occasional AI inquiries and 25% are seeing increasing scrutiny. Uri flagged a trend worth tracking: insurance defense clients are beginning to specify which AI tools outside firms should use, in some cases directing lawyers to work within the client’s own system.

“If you’re not prepared for that conversation, I think it’s not going to be too far off - three months, six months, nine months - where your clients are going to come to you and say, do you have an AI system? Because if not, we have one that we actually prefer you use.”

- Uri Gutfreund

The Talent Pipeline & Young Lawyer Development



Conference Poll: What is your top concern about generative AI in the practice of law?

When Atlanta attendees were asked their top concern about generative AI in legal practice, 46% named the training and development of young lawyers, well ahead of hallucinated work product at 23% and client confidentiality at 11%.

Uri stated the concern plainly: if AI handles the work that has historically trained junior associates, the profession risks a generation without foundational legal skills. Crissy was less alarmed, comparing the shift to the disappearance of document redlining, work that consumed significant associate time and is now largely automated. AI will displace some tasks that were never really lawyering, she argued, and may accelerate younger lawyers' path to substantive matters.

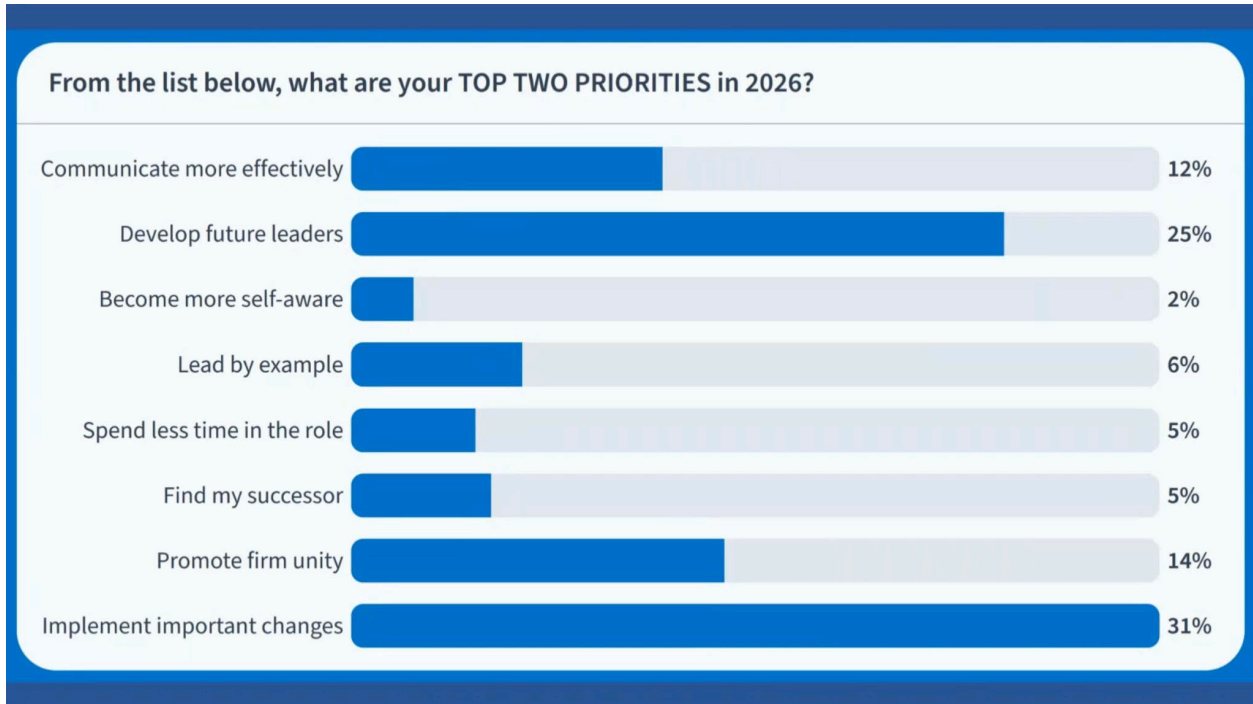
Roger added that prompt engineering requires genuine legal knowledge; you cannot evaluate whether AI reached the right answer without knowing what the right answer should look like.

Surprises from the Conference

Roger's most counterintuitive observation from the conference was that senior partners were more engaged with AI than younger colleagues. Uri's half-serious explanation was that they are paying for the tools and some see AI as a substitute for associate hours. Uri was also struck by how far ahead a handful of attendees already were, with clear visions, multiple tools deployed, and technology-specialized hires in place.

Crissy was pleasantly surprised by how broadly AI is already in use and predicted agentic AI will dominate next year's conference. John pointed to a [15-lawyer immigration boutique in Buffalo](#) that committed to ChatGPT early and has since built a national profile (its founder now appears regularly on CNN) as proof that early commitment matters more than firm size.

Leadership Priorities & MPF Guidance



Conference Poll: Top two personal leadership priorities in 2026

The conference closed with managing partners reflecting on personal leadership priorities. Implementing important changes led at 31%, developing future leaders at 25%, and promoting firm unity at 14%. Both Roger and Crissy named future leader development and firm unity as their top two. Crissy offered a generational reframe: younger professionals do not define loyalty the way their predecessors did, and firms that treat lateral movement as a loyalty problem rather than a structural reality will continue to struggle.

MPF GUIDANCE

- Lean into the Future with a Strategic Approach
- Dive into Generative AI – Platforms, Policy, Training
- Provide Training and Support
- Talk to Your Clients
- Educate Your Partners, Associates and Support Staff
- Experiment with Value-Based Pricing Models
- Be Transparent with Young Lawyers and Support Staff



MPF Guidance

Uri concluded the webinar with the point that the succession question is not simply who holds the managing partner title, but whether the firm has people capable of leading through genuine uncertainty. Firms making visible AI investments send a signal that attracts forward-thinking talent.

The closing MPF guidance synthesized the session:

- Develop a strategic vision
- Commit to AI platforms, policy, and training
- Invest in prompt engineering
- Talk to clients proactively
- Educate the full firm
- Experiment with value-based pricing
- Be transparent with young lawyers about how AI will shape their roles

“Whatever system you use - communicate it, communicate it, communicate it. There should be no surprises.”

- Uri Gutfreund