



Emerging Communication Trends in the Legal Industry

2023 GLOBAL STUDY



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Executive Summary

Eleview Consulting led programming across over fifteen countries and six continents in 2023, enabling us to collect over 5,000 data points on the emerging trends in workplace communication.

Through our interactive, high-energy workshops, individual and group coaching, and custom programming, we've:

- ⦿ Ensured attorneys feel confident **leading critical, and often difficult, conversations** with their colleagues that ultimately drive positive change
- ⦿ Equipped supervising attorneys to **delegate in a way that provides clear direction and purpose** using the “One More Sentence” technique
- ⦿ Empowered attorneys and business professionals to **effectively advocate for their ideas** using a proven four-step framework
- ⦿ Provided **concrete frameworks for identifying sources of stress** and then creating an action plan that leads to micro-improvements
- ⦿ Incorporated **science-backed active listening techniques** into everyday conversations so clients and colleagues feel valued and understood
- ⦿ Excited lawyers about building and **strengthening their professional relationships** in a hybrid work environment

This global study distills the critical trends in law firm communication and provides concrete recommendations for professional development leaders. Use this report to:

- ⦿ **Harmonize communication and understanding** across all levels of your firm
- ⦿ **Evaluate your current professional development** initiatives to ensure you teach these interpersonal skills and clearly convey expectations
- ⦿ **Discuss key takeaways** with colleagues and initiate conversations about how to retain and develop your attorneys



The Lost Art of Chit Chat

Everyone wants to feel heard, valued, and understood. With less small talk and active listening happening, relationships aren't being formed to the depth and degree they have in the past. This negatively impacts retention, satisfaction, and collaboration. It should not be undervalued.

WHAT HAPPENED TO SMALL TALK?

Small talk needs to happen before there's enough trust to cover deeper, more intimate subjects.

There are two primary factors causing a decline in small talk: young professionals are typically uncomfortable with it, and hybrid work environments aren't conducive to it.

Today's young professionals are digital natives who are accustomed to purpose-focused communication via text, email, or instant messaging. These modes of communication create slim opportunities for casual conversation to get to know someone new. They also don't allow young professionals to learn how to pick up on subtle social cues such as body language. As Gen Z (anyone born between 1997 – 2012) enters the workforce, informal conversation in the hallway or before the start of a meeting is not a developed skill.

Secondly, hybrid work environments create disadvantages for those not physically together. Virtual colleagues are often left out of informal conversations. With people coming into the office on different days of the week, there are fewer organic opportunities for a spontaneous lunch or coffee.



WANTED: SOMEONE WHO ACTIVELY LISTENS

Exacerbating this issue is the rise in constant distraction. Actively listening to another person by asking follow-up questions, making consistent eye contact, and giving them your full attention are hard to come by. In Eleview Consulting's *The Power of Active Listening* workshop, where we teach tactical ways to confirm understanding of assignments and key points, participants apply science-backed listening techniques with their peers.

When we ask our participants how it felt to have someone actively listen to them after going through an interactive exercise, the two most common responses are “validating” and “amazing.” It's so simple to bring these positive feelings to another person and yet we rarely take the steps needed to do so.

There's significant risk in not teaching active listening skills. When we aren't listening, miscommunication abounds:

1. A junior associate spends hours going down the wrong path on an assignment
2. A Partner feels their time is being wasted when they are speaking on a panel to summer associates
3. Associates don't feel understood or appreciated by their mentor who is always checking their phone during a weekly 1:1

TEACHING SMALL TALK AND ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS

For experienced lawyers, the thought of having to teach how to make small talk or active listening techniques can seem like a superfluous task. And yet, it's a learned skill that many of today's junior associates have not mastered. Here are three best practices to reinforce in your firm:

1. Ask at least **two follow-up questions** in every conversation to demonstrate you heard the other person and are thinking critically about what they said
2. **Identify what the other person wants to talk about** and lean into that topic (if they mention they went to the dog park over the weekend, ask more questions about their dog)
3. Catch and **clarify “blurry” words** that could mean something different to each person. The speaker assumes alignment even when it's unlikely there is alignment (“You mention you want our group to be more *collaborative*. What does collaboration look like to you?”)





Eleview Program Spotlight: The Power of Active Listening

A fast talker speaks at an average rate of 125 words per minute, but the brain can process 400 words per minute. This leaves 75% of our brain ripe for distraction when we are listening to someone speak.

It takes *discipline* to actively listen to another person and focus on what they are saying. In this interactive workshop, we teach attorneys and business professionals science-backed techniques on *how* to actively listen to confirm understanding. This can include understanding someone's priorities, a new assignment, a supervising attorney's feedback, and the key takeaways from a meeting. This workshop can be customized to include relationship-building and small talk techniques to build rapport with colleagues and clients.

Case Study: Women's Retreat for Polsinelli's Rising Leaders

Polsinelli is an Am Law 100 firm with more than 1,000 attorneys in 22 offices nationwide. Recognized by legal research firm BTI Consulting as one of the top firms for excellent client service and client relationships, Polsinelli attorneys provide value through practical legal counsel infused with business insight.

Program Overview

In August 2023 Eleview Consulting facilitated *Women on the Cusp*, a 2-day retreat for 35 of Polsinelli's female attorneys who are on the cusp of becoming Shareholder. This unique program fostered an environment where women engaged in dialogue about the challenges they anticipate as a Shareholder and generated recommendations on how the firm can continuously improve its culture so they can confidently build sustainable careers.

The goal of the retreat was to signal how invested Polsinelli is in their retention and development, allow women to build peer relationships, and demystify what it means to be a Shareholder at the firm.

Key Components of the Program

This highly interactive program was so effective because it incorporated the following components:

- ① **Clarifying the expectations of newly promoted Shareholders** (e.g., firm citizenship, billable requirements, and compensation)
- ① Reflecting on **common sources of stress** for female attorneys and identifying commonality among peers
- ① Applying a **science-backed framework for advocating for ideas** to create micro-improvements in both personal and professional life
- ① Generating ideas and recommendations for the firm to consider that enable women to have **sustainable, meaningful careers** at Polsinelli long-term
- ① **Engaging in discussion** with the firm Chairman and department chair around these ideas for continuous improvement
- ① Aligning on commitments and action items to **ensure accountability and progress** post-retreat
- ① Creating camaraderie among participants so they have a **peer support system** and strengthened **business referral network**

Themes Discussed

Participants developed actionable ideas to positively influence firm culture and structure. The themes they focused on included:

- ⦿ Leadership Selection & Development
- ⦿ Path to Promotion
- ⦿ Business Development and Origination
- ⦿ Professional Sustainability
- ⦿ Readiness for Shareholder

Feedback From Participants

This program received overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants. In fact, **100% of women said they found it valuable. They rated their overall experience a 4.75/5.** The key takeaways they left with include:

- ⦿ “I feel like the firm cares about me and my future.”
- ⦿ “I need to be proactive about relationship building.”
- ⦿ “I want to be a Shareholder at Polsinelli.”

⦿ **“Best retreat I’ve been to.”**

- ⦿ “Really appreciated this program and would love similar programs.”

⦿ **“My favorite part about this retreat was getting together as a cohort, networking, collective support and discussion, greater clarity, and renewed energy for this next phase of my career.”**



Advocate For Yourself: A Lesson from RBG

Ruth Bader Ginsberg once said, “Fight for the things that you care about, but do it in a way that will lead others to join you.” Regardless of political beliefs, her message is particularly important when advocating ideas in the workplace.

BALANCING SELF-AWARENESS AND CONFIDENCE

Through our professional development workshops, group coaching programs, and individual coaching, our team has seen an uptick in professionals boldly sharing their ideas or needs. While this is a positive dynamic in many ways, professionals are less likely to be persuasive if they fail to position those ideas in a way that aligns with group and firm priorities.

There’s often a lack of self-awareness. Professionals aren’t mindful of how they’re being perceived or how their ideas impact others.

Without training, and the acute self-awareness that accompanies it, professionals are often not skilled – or even mindful – of how others perceive them and their ideas. Impact, and at times their reputation, suffers.

There are also plenty of scenarios where we find attorneys don’t advocate for themselves, whether it’s because they’ve been shut down in the past, they don’t trust their supervising attorney, or they’ve developed an apathetic approach to their work. Destructive attitudes can spread across practice groups, weakening morale.

Our research has found that the average professional rates their confidence in advocating for themselves, and their ideas, at work as a 3.5 / 5.

Such mediocre self-assessments regarding an essential aspect of work dramatize a need for firms to clearly convey a receptiveness to fresh ideas (and then to consider those ideas, even if immediate change is not possible).



POSITIONING YOUR IDEAS IS AN ART AND SCIENCE

Advocating for yourself can take on many forms:

- ⦿ Asking for **increased responsibility** on a project to develop a new skill
- ⦿ Requesting to **shadow a deposition** or client lunch to gain exposure to new environments
- ⦿ **Sharing an idea** or recommendation with your supervising attorney
- ⦿ Seeking to **understand the competencies** that need to be mastered before being eligible for Partnership
- ⦿ Gaining **buy-in from your group** on a new process you designed

It's essential that attorneys feel confident advocating for themselves. This has been proven to increase productivity, creativity, and satisfaction. Yet, there's an art and a science to doing it successfully.

The art of advocating encompasses awareness of how your idea impacts others. When it is positioned in a way that takes into consideration group priorities, client goals, and workload allocation, it's more likely to be well-received.

The science of advocating involves providing explanation for the why behind a proposed change. Simply put, people like to have reasons for what they do. Including "because" is scientifically proven to be a significant factor in predicting the success of getting others onboard.

EMPOWER ATTORNEYS TO ADVOCATE FOR THEMSELVES AND THEIR IDEAS

Firm leaders can create an environment where lawyers feel confident sharing new ideas, making suggestions, and asking for career development opportunities. Three actionable ways to create this positive workplace culture include:

- ⦿ **Ask Questions:** Phrase questions in a way that demonstrates an openness to new ideas. For example, a Partner might ask "What can I do that would make a 10% improvement in your experience at work?"
- ⦿ **Pilot Ideas:** It can be daunting to commit long-term to a new change or idea, so try a two-week pilot. When someone asks for an opportunity or proposes a new idea, commit to trying it out for two weeks and then have a debrief to discuss how it went.
- ⦿ **Find a Yes:** Even if it's not possible to bring someone's idea to life, there is always a way to get them one micro-step closer to what their desired future state looks like. By finding something to say "yes" to, you'll signal that you're committed to a culture of continuous improvement.

ELEVIEW PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: Advocate for Yourself and Your Ideas Workshop

When attorneys feel empowered to propose new ideas, raise awareness of problems, and identify career development opportunities, engagement (and client service!) skyrocket.

In our *Advocate for Yourself and Your Ideas* workshop, we leverage a proven framework for getting others equally as excited about your ideas. Participants walk away with a clear idea of how to align their objectives with those of their team or firm, strategies for positioning ideas to encourage receptivity, and techniques to respond to pushback. This workshop is unique in that it **instills a powerful self-advocacy skillset** while also helping participants develop both self-awareness and other-awareness.

The most successful firms are those where attorneys have a determined sense of agency and take initiative to further firm objectives.



Closing Message

Thank you to our clients for trusting us with your professional development programs. There's nothing we love more than seeing transformation happen in real time when attorneys gain the skills needed to initiate positive, meaningful change. We look forward to continuing to work with your professionals to make communication, leadership, and relationship-building skills concrete and actionable. **We train associates, Partners, and business professionals at law firms around the world, in-person and virtually.**

TIPPING POINT SKILLS FOR ASSOCIATES

Rapidly equip your summer associates, new first-year class, and mid-level associates with the critical professional communication skills needed to succeed in our modern workplace. Our most popular skills include email responsiveness, professional presence and proactive relationship-building at work.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Give senior associates and Partners insight into how to empower associates, delegate work, and lead wildly effective one-on-one meetings. *Our most popular skills include navigating generational dynamics, providing difficult feedback, leading critical conversations, and creating psychological safety.*

HIGH-IMPACT GROUP COACHING

Invest in the ongoing development of your attorneys through our unique, impactful group coaching experience. With intentionally assigned small cohorts, we create an environment of honesty and trust where our cohort participants discuss the scenarios they're challenged with, and are held accountable by, their peers.

CUSTOM ENGAGEMENTS

Show your attorneys you're invested in their growth with tailored keynotes, programs for an ERG, and energizing mentorship program kickoff events. Our most popular skills include adapting your communication, investing in mentor relationships, and internal relationship-building.

We understand your firm is unique. All of our client engagements are customized to meet your specific needs and complement your internal programming. Your input and collaboration allow us to lead impactful and engaging programs. To schedule a consultation to discuss bringing our custom professional development experiences to your firm, or for media and press inquiries, please contact us at: info@eleviewconsulting.com

You can see our current portfolio of programming on our website at www.EleviewConsulting.com. We appreciate your interest in our work building communication skills and we look forward to partnering with you.

Elise Powers

Elise Powers
Founder and CEO, Eleview Consulting
elise@eleviewconsulting.com

