Philip Bryce

Global Chief Knowledge Officer, Mayer Brown

In this exclusive interview, we sat down with Mayer Brown's visionary Global Chief Knowledge Officer, Philip Bryce. In this wide-ranging discussion, we explored his personal journey balancing careers in both acting and law, how he's navigated delivering a global knowledge strategy at one of the world's most prestigious law firms and what's in store for the ever-evolving relationship between technology and the law.

So we're going back to before you were a KM professional; what job did you want to do when you were growing up?

That is really an interesting question for me because I wasn't laser focused on any one thing. There were a lot of things that I liked and phases that I went through. I considered being a mathematician, since I was good at math. I got into photography, so I actually had a tentative plan at one point to go to a particular college to become a professional photographer.

Then, there was a time in my life when I thought I might attend culinary school. Finally, when I started college, I was a sociology major, so I thought of becoming a lawyer, an actor or a pilot. All were in there somewhere, but I still wasn't sure.

So what was the moment when you realised you were going to pursue a legal career?

Well, I studied theatre in college, and I come from a family of actors - that was the family business, if you like. My father was a soap opera leading man, he and my mother met in the theatre. When I graduated from college, I worked a little bit as an actor, however at that point, my dad's acting work was tailing off somewhat so my family had a little bit of economic pressure. As a result, I decided in five minutes one afternoon that I should just take that pressure off and look for a steady job and stick to the theatre at night. And so I thought, I'll be a lawyer by day and an actor by night! It sounded perfect to me - it would be a balanced life...

What's your earliest memory of getting stuck in with tech? Is there anything that sparked your technological interest?

In high school, in the late 1960s, I took a computer programming class that I thought would be interesting. I think we were programming in Fortran at that time. At this stage, we're talking about very simple logic programmes - addition, counting steps etc. - things that modern day calculators would find very easy to do! Bear in mind, this was still at the stage where you had to feed a tape into the computer, so it was all pretty primitive - nevertheless, I was really fascinated by computers, and so that interest was planted then.

Have you kept up that interest in coding?

I'd like to say yes, but the reality is no; I don't still code today. At one stage, I entered a raffle, and I won the whole Microsoft C+ programming suite and guidance books - it kept up my interest in technology, but it still remained a

hobby for me. In the 1980s, when PCs became available, I was still the guy that paid the extra $500 for the five-megabyte hard drive. and I read the manual completely, end to end.

Then, in the 1990s, as the world wide web took off, I found my legal career and computers converged further - I came across a guy in Maine who maintained something called the Legal List, which was a directory of legal resources. At first, it was 30 pages, the next year, 60 and then 250 pages...I really thought, "wow", this web thing is really going to change everything!

Do you think lawyers should code?

The quick, simple answer is no - I'm not sure that lawyers really need to. However, what lawyers do every day is code - contract drafting is all about assembling the correct logic statements. So, if there's a new case, then we need to add a new clause that addresses a particular condition or circumstance. When you're reading / reviewing a contract, you're effectively debugging, too - for example, if these facts apply, does my obligation that I've tried to capture in my clause still stand?

Do you think your time as a Law Clerk and Associate at what was Bingham, Dana & Gould made you a better KM professional?

I'm interpreting your question as, "does practice experience pay off for a knowledge management lawyer?". There are undoubtedly excellent knowledge management professionals who are not lawyers like people who have gone through the library route. On the other hand, my legal experience has definitely helped. How to read statutes, interpret case law and understand judges make decisions are all skills I've picked up as an associate.

My experience as a lawyer has also definitely given me empathy, having worked at various points in my career for 17 hours a day, every day for three weeks in a row. When you start to realise that as a result of those working patterns, some associates are missing family events, the KM team becomes very important - with better materials at their fingertips, we have the ability to give that time back to the fee earners.

How has being an actor in NY benefited your role as a KM professional?

People often say that acting and law are similar, and I think in terms of public speaking, they are similar. However, I don't think it's common for someone who likes calculus to also like performing Shakespeare, Eugene O'Neill and have an emotional side. I think that interplay helps me because, as knowledge management professionals, we are interpreters between the lawyers and the technologists. We must think about "How am I going to get people to use this?" and "What is their experience using this?". "What does it mean to them?"

So I think being an actor has helped me attune that part of my brain to the human experience as it relates to knowledge management. It's interesting - I think we are back to that central thread that empathy plays a big role in how I approach strategy and communication, in terms of "what" we will do and "why".

How have you seen legal innovation progress over the past 23 years of your experience as a KM professional?

It has been so interesting to have started practising law at a time when the typewriter was the primary technology that was used. My secretary had a typewriter. We had to keep track of everything we created for three months with an extra carbon copy - when the IBM memory typewriter came along, it literally changed our lives!

There's been a lot of technological advancement, but that isn't to say that it is great in all aspects of the legal profession. Take the concept of originals, the processes and standards around what constitutes an "original" document have taken hundreds of years to develop and have since disappeared.

Previously, when I received an "original" letter as a lawyer, before computers, no one had to tell me the significance of this document - I knew it was important and that I had to get it into a folder in the file room! I guess some of the reverence around legal concepts has gone now - there's certainly no similar weight attached

to the original, as there once was. Another example that's often on my mind is how do we restore a sense of "context". Before, when I was assigned to a new matter, I would go to the file room and get the correspondence folder and the pleadings folder. I would read the contents of the folders, and at the end of that, I would know everything about the case - I'd have a tremendous amount of context.

" Could we do some things with **AI** that help evaluate risk? "

Now, if I'm being honest, that doesn't exist to the same extent - I think lawyers, especially newer lawyers, are used to diving into a matter just to do their niche part. So when I think of innovation, I think of how we can get back some of the full context and experience that used to exist when we had more time. And how to make those old processes far more efficient.

I think that's where AI comes in - could we do some things with AI that help evaluate risk? Could we make it easier to structure deals since we understand better what might happen in the future, based on predictive analytics? Or, what if we started thinking about deals in a different way, by using AI to evaluate that level of trust? I'm thinking eBay-style here - if the seller has established themselves to be trustworthy, then can we speed the deal up (and therefore simplify the documentation) because of their track-record on previous transactions. Simple as that, right?!

As a global chief knowledge officer (based in New York), are there different trends you've observed between different legal markets (e.g. US (New York), UK, European markets)?

In the UK, people are focused on using people to solve problems (for example, with specialist roles like the professional support lawyer, which is a great innovation). In the US, it has been

more about giving lawyers access to (legal) data - i.e. could a legal search engine work and why it wasn't available in their technology to do this.

However, despite localised trends, we have to remember we're serving our clients and our clients have global businesses and therefore need global advice that is coordinated and consistent. As such, we try to have a global and consistent mindset to solve their problems.

Would you say Mayer Brown's innovation mandate is driven more by the firm's lawyers or clients?
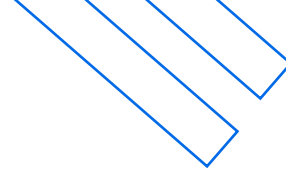
100% by the clients and the lawyers who are thinking about the clients. Of course, we have lawyers who say, "why do I have to hit this key on my computer 50 times to find and replace a term? Isn't there a tool that could automate that?" However, those are more tactical solutions to short-term problems. I think it's when we think about our clients that we think more about long-term relationship process integrations and different kinds of innovation.

" Automating helps with **speed and efficiency,** getting the job done faster and at a **lower cost** for the client."

You work at a global law firm; what are the most demanding challenges you encounter as a KM professional there?

I'm so fortunate to have, in my humble opinion, the best knowledge management lawyer team of any law firm in the world. I would say the biggest challenge is finding those people
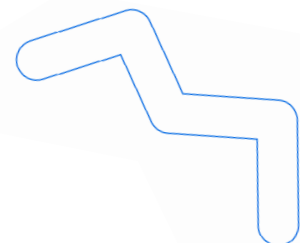
and keeping them engaged and deployed strategically.

Of course, other things do frustrate me - for example, data issues concerning whether we can move as quickly as we want to in terms of deploying technology. In terms of challenges, mapping processes deeply, really understanding them before we consider them as automation candidates, can be quite hard (but fun!).

" Automating also **helps with lawyer retention** as it is less frustrating for the lawyers doing the work. With automation, **they feel more confident and supported.** "

Mayer Brown's KM team was shortlisted as an American Lawyer Industry Awards finalist for Best Business Services Team during 2021… as a senior KM professional, what are the most significant benefits of using an automated process for you?

There can be so many benefits! We want to continue the excellent lawyering quality that we have. We know there is risk in just grabbing the last example of a document off the shelf that might have been even heavily negotiated in a way that isn't the best for our current client.

On the other hand, an automated document makes you think about all these things and simultaneously gives you a fresh start - it produces a safer document, in my opinion. In addition, automating helps with speed and efficiency, getting the job done faster and at a lower cost for the client.

It also helps with lawyer retention as it is less frustrating for the lawyers doing the work. With automation, they feel more confident and supported. I know that if I were a practising lawyer at a law firm, I would like to feel supported and enabled to do the highest level of thinking and work as opposed to having to dig the trench or the timeline.

As new LegalTech innovations occur, how do you see your role as a KM professional growing soon?

We need to stay on top of the ways in which we can improve the delivery of legal services and make our lawyers happier and delight our clients. We have to think about what parts of our business can benefit from being assembly lines. We also have to think strategically when looking at the data collected at our law firms. I think data is going to become way, way more important as we start to think about what makes a difference. What do our clients care about? How is what we're doing affecting behaviour? We have model documents. Are they being used? Are the clauses we're drafting giving the desired results? Are they resulting in disputes, or are they making a difference?

I'm definitely excited thinking about what is going to happen a year and a half from now. What legal issues are on the horizon? What do we see in the news? And we've seen this in the past. For example, the mortgage-backed security crisis. Did you anticipate it, and were you ready? How could you have been ahead of the curve?

It's important to consider what issues will be important two years from now and how knowledge lawyers can help our firm be ready for them.

Quick fire Q's ▷▷▷

Quick fire Q's

What is the best piece of tech you can't live without under $100?

I'm going to cheat here and say spellcheck! I don't think anyone got credit for developing spellcheck. It never had to be reviewed by my risk management team. I've never had to pilot it. It helps us work a lot faster, and it quickly learns about common new words that we use. Everybody uses it - and it's intuitive.

Which piece of tech have you bought that you actually never use?

I'm afraid that a lot of my purchases on Amazon start off with the right intention, but I don't use them any more!

What is the best decision you've made for a home office setup?

Bigger monitors!

What's the best app on your phone?

Safari for web browsing.

Do you prefer working from home or the office?

I like working in the office, but I prefer not to do my long commute every day. If I lived across the street from the office, I would come every day.