

4 Things Weighing On Law Firm Leaders' Minds At Midyear

By Aebra Coe

Law360 (July 14, 2025, 1:17 PM EDT) -- Law firm leaders are facing numerous challenges at the start of the second half of 2025, from a tumultuous geopolitical environment, to an uncertain economy, to massive technological advances.

Each challenge presents risks but also opportunities for law firms, according to firm leaders who say they plan to move quickly to take advantage of the opportunities presented to them not only today, but also throughout the rest of the year.

"In a time when economic uncertainty and policy change is peaking, the challenges our clients confront become greater," said Phil Inglima, chair of Crowell & Moring LLP.

Law firms and their clients are operating in "an era of economic and geopolitical whiplash," where a global event, a Federal Reserve decision, or an election can radically shift client behavior and business confidence overnight, said Kristina Lawson, managing partner and chief executive of Hanson Bridgett LLP.

"The volume of risk our clients are managing has never been higher — and they're looking to us not only as legal counsel, but as strategic advisers who can help them navigate change," Lawson said.

Here, Inglima, Lawson and five other law firm leaders reveal the biggest challenges on their minds going into the second half of the year.

Making the Most of an Uncertain Economy

Many of the leaders said that despite the uncertain times, there's been an uptick in demand for certain practice areas as clients look to legal counsel in a shifting regulatory and economic environment.

Luca Salvi, chairman of Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton LLP, said the firm's lawyers are closely monitoring evolving economic conditions and how they impact clients.

"This year we are already seeing a surge in demand ... and with that comes the internal challenge of balancing immediate client needs with our firm's long-term strategic plan," Salvi said.

That balance is something Inglima is focused on as well, with some practice areas slowing and others picking up speed simultaneously.

"While over time we fully expect more balance to return to the pace for all our practices, some are under great demand presently, while others are still anticipating a resumption of usual demand levels," Inglima said. "That means finding ways to deploy talent to the most pressing demands, and to look ahead to how our clients' needs will level off or shift in the months ahead."

Lawson said that her firm is organizing around clients by building out cross-functional client teams that are proactive toward shifts and changes that impact firm clients.

"[Those] teams anticipate [client] needs, assemble the right experts, and launch new capabilities," she said. "It's about helping clients stay ahead of the curve and reducing risk through integrated legal and policy strategies."

According to Pryor Cashman managing partner David Rose, the window to win new work in fast-moving markets and shifting conditions is often narrow.

"The firms that succeed are the ones that are attuned to client needs, can clearly articulate the value proposition they offer, and — unburdened by heavy bureaucracy — are ready to act," Rose said. "It's not just about spotting the opportunity — it's about having the infrastructure and mindset to mobilize across practice areas and quickly deliver the solutions clients actually need in a challenging economic environment."

Managing Multiple Generations in the Workplace

Jamie Lawless, chief executive of Husch Blackwell, said one of the challenges that she's watching is the complexity of leading and engaging a workforce that spans four generations "with vastly different values, expectations and communication styles."

Leading a multigenerational workforce, Lawless said, calls for intentional culture design.

"We're not just managing age diversity; we're managing different values, work expectations and communication preferences. Ensuring everyone feels welcomed, respected and seen regardless of generational differences is critical to any organization," she said.

Lawless pointed to the law firm's remote office, The Link, as one adaptation to different workplace preferences.

"It's about meeting people where they are to ensure we remain connected with them in a meaningful way," she said.

Robins Kaplan LLP chair Tony Froio said remote work and the future of how and where lawyers work are on his mind as well.

"The pandemic reshaped expectations, and while we've established firmwide standards, there's still some tension between those expectations and consistent in-office presence," Froio said.

Striking a balance between allowing for flexibility and encouraging collaboration and culture makes the topic a complicated one to navigate, he said.

"We've tasked a strategic planning subcommittee with evaluating our current approach, gathering input from across the firm, and presenting options that reflect both our people's needs and the operational realities of the business," Froio said. "We want sustainable, well-informed policies that support high performance and connection."

Grappling With Major Changes in Generative AI

According to Tony White, firmwide managing partner of Thompson Hine LLP, generative artificial intelligence is changing the way his law firm serves clients and operates on a number of different levels, creating both challenges and opportunities in the process.

The firm is working to embed generative AI into its legal service delivery, from contract negotiation to litigation forecasting and regulatory analysis, White said.

"The pace of AI innovation is relentless, but law firm adoption must be deliberate. We need to train our professionals, build trust with clients and develop robust governance — all while managing the uncertainty around regulatory oversight and evolving client expectations," he said.

According to Lawless, AI is reshaping not only how Husch Blackwell delivers legal services, but also how it develops talent and operates internally.

"Embracing AI as a business imperative means more than adopting new technology; it requires building trust, competency and fluency both firmwide and with our clients, which takes time and a coordinated effort," Lawless said.

AI, automation, and evolving client expectations are pushing the legal industry beyond the point of minor tweaks — an industrywide reset is already underway in how legal services are delivered, according to Hanson Bridgett's Lawson.

"The question isn't whether firms will adapt, but how fast and how well," she said. "For firms like ours that are committed to innovation and values-driven leadership, this is both a challenge and an opportunity to lead from the front."

Navigating Growth in a Busy Marketplace for Talent

In a competitive market for lateral talent, many of the law firm leaders pointed to managing that growth as an important challenge.

Recruiting is a top priority at Robins Kaplan, especially at the lateral partner and experienced associate levels, according to Froio.

"The market has shifted significantly over the last few years, with more mobility among attorneys and greater competition across the Am Law landscape," Froio said.

The law firm's approach to navigating that environment, he said, is to build a streamlined recruiting team that works closely with recruiters to meet the firm's needs nationally — not just market by market.

"This allows us to be more strategic, more efficient, and ultimately more successful in identifying and securing top talent," he said.

According to White, Thompson Hine has recently added a significant number of partners laterally, growing the law firm, but also creating a need to address how the law firm will manage that growth effectively.

"What's keeping us up at night? It's not concern over whether we can attract talent — it's keeping pace with our own success," he said. "As our momentum builds, so does attention from competitors. We're increasingly being recognized as a firm that's drawing top-tier talent, and we expect the market will respond."

Lawless pointed to a need to manage growth effectively as a concern as well.

"We've grown by design, not default, but rapid client demand and expanding industry practices require modern infrastructure, deep collaboration, and nimble talent models that avoid burnout while staying ahead of what clients need next," she said.

In February Husch Blackwell restructured its leadership and deployed a new business operations structure, creating an operations division and a separate marketing and business development division, Lawless said.

"With that foundation in place, we're well-positioned to ensure our business operations scale intentionally and in lockstep with client needs," she said.

--Editing by Robert Rudinger.