Best of Pioneers and Pathfinders: Damien Riehl

(This transcript was generated through AI technology.)

Steve Poor
Hi. This is Steve Poor, and you're listening to Pioneers and Pathfinders.

This week, we're revisiting one of our most compelling conversations—with Damien Riehl, a technology lawyer, coder, and thought leader at the intersection of law and innovation. At the time of our conversation, Damien was vice president and Solutions Champion at vLex. vLex recently made headlines with its acquisition by Clio, which is a move that signals a new chapter in the evolution of legal technology. So, we thought now is an apt time to replay this conversation with Damien.

His career has spanned roles at Thomson, Reuters, Fastcase, and the SALI Alliance. Our discussion touched on a wide range of topics: his early experience as a tech attorney, the complexities of confidentiality and legal AI, music copyright, and the enduring value of a liberal arts education. We hope you enjoy this encore episode as much as we did.

Our guest today is Damien Riehl. Damien is vice president and Solutions Champion at vLex. vLex is a platform using artificial intelligence solutions to streamline workflows and provide lawyers with greater access to knowledge and resources. Damien was a tech attorney for more than 10 years when he made the leap to Thomson Reuters as Senior Product Strategist. In that role, he developed innovative legal technology involving artificial intelligence, machine learning, and natural language processing. Inspired by Ed Walters' efforts to democratize the law, Damien later joined Fastcase, where he served various roles building out legal tools and systems. In his current position at vLex, which bought Fastcase, Damien helps lead the design, development, and expansion of products. Additionally, Damien is part of the leadership team at the Standards Advancement for the Legal Industry, which is known as SALI. He's also co-founder of All the Music LLC, a project that involved copywriting 471 billion--with a B--melodies and placing them in the public domain. Damien delivered a TED talk in which he describes the process and offers a new way to handle copyright infringement lawsuits in music. In today's conversation, Damien discusses vLex's newest product, Vincent AI, his decision to leave practice and join Thomson Reuters, the genesis of All the Music and the future of teaching legal research. Thanks to Damien for his time and the interesting conversation.

Damien, great to see you. Thanks for joining us today.

Damien Riehl
Thank you so much for having me on. Steve. I really appreciate it.

Steve Poor
I look forward to our chat. There's so much to talk about: music, your own journey, and SALI. Let's start with what at least at the time we're recording this, is hot news, which is that the good folks at vLex, of

which are a key member just announced, Vincent AI. Tell us a little bit about that product and what distinguishes it.

Damien Riehl
It goes to the problem that we're trying to solve. As a product person, I always want to say, what are the problems that lawyers have that need to be solved? And then think about what the tools to best solve those problems are. And the problem that we were really focusing on solving is that large language models, as Mr. Schwartz from New York has realized, they tend to make things up. They tend to hallucinate. So the name of the game is to trust the large language models output, but then verify that, to be able to see that those are actual cases, actual statutes. So going from the problem to solve and to be able to how to best solve that, we think we've kind of tried to solve that problem, and we think we've successfully done so, where, within Vincent AI, what you do, one of the skills is to ask a legal question, and then you get actual quotations from actual cases, actual statutes, actual regulations, and then right on the same page, we actually provide you a block quote of the paragraph that actually answers the question that you asked, so that trust but verify side is that you can immediately verify within the case the actual text from that case to be able to answer that question. So it literally, does not take minutes, but takes seconds to be able to validate that text from that case.

Steve Poor
Now, the lawyer in New York also had quotes, but he asked ChatGPT apparently, if they were real, and he was told they were. You're not validating it that way. So tell us a little bit more about how this structure avoids hallucination.

Damien Riehl
Sure. So there's two ways to get information out of a large language model. Way number one is to ask a foundational model like GPT, out of the box, give me an answer, and then it is almost certain to hallucinate some. That's option number one. Option number two is to say, "Hey, large language model, here's a document. Within the four corners of the document, tell me whether this answers the question or doesn't." Then the hallucinations are next to zero. So really the difference ... Mr. Schwartz chose option number one, asking the foundational out of the box. But vLex chooses option number two, where what we do is we do in vector embedding search to say that the question that you've asked: Does that match the text from an actual case, or the text from an actual statute, or the text of an actual regulation, and we essentially do that mapping. So it's the large language model is not the thing that is making up the text of the case, but we are doing that before it even hits the large language model. We're finding the match of the text. So, in that way, that's what's called in the industry, retrieval, augmented generation. That is, we retrieve the cases that match, then from there, we take those 20 cases, and then we build a memorandum around those 20 cases. The number of hallucinations is next to zero, because the idea is that it's not asking out of the box. It's going with option two that I described earlier.

Steve Poor
And of course, vLex bought Fastcase, which works off a huge base of information.

Damien Riehl

That's right. Fastcase, over the last 20 years, since 1999 I guess 23 or 24 years now, has been accumulating all the cases, all the statutes, all the regulations, and everyday updates, those cases, statutes and regulations in a non-hallucinatory way. That is, we get the actual, actual data from the actual courts, which is necessary. And if you think about who has that US data, only three companies in the world have that US data. You can guess what the other two are. And then there's vLex. So that's thing number one, we don't all only have us data though. We have 100 countries worldwide. Because many of your listeners will know about Ed and Phil starting fastcase 20 years ago for US data, but you may not know Luis and Angel, who are at Barcelona, Spain, who were 20 years ago, doing that worldwide. So they were doing it in Spain, and then Latin America, and then they acquired a company called justice out of the United Kingdom. And so, now we've built up an empire of oil for over 100 countries, 110 jurisdictions, 110 countries. And if you were to say to the duopoly, do you have 100 countries? I would like to hear their answer to that question, and to run large language models to be able to ask, say, a 50-state survey, you need all 50 states. And to ask a 50-country survey, you need 50 countries to be able to do that. And so vLex has that data, we have that oil to be able to run large language models across and to do 50-country surveys. And so you don't need thousands of people in the bowels of a large duopoly compound to be able to do summaries, to do these things. And vLex ... turns out that large language models can do a lot of that work much more efficiently.

Steve Poor
Yeah, I was reading about it. I know it's early days from a client standpoint, and it's certainly been well received in the market. But one of the interesting things to me is that it crafts arguments for you. It's not just the retrieval, "Find me cases that say this." It actually crafts arguments and counter arguments. I read a recent Stephanie Wilkens article in law.com where she had somebody create a counter argument and found a case someone had just litigated, which was, you. Tell us a little bit about how this avoids some of the problems other systems have.

Damien Riehl
Sure. So I was a litigator for 15 years, so I know that sometimes I want an objective answer to a question. And so we have a skill that says, "Answer a question objectively." We also have a skill that says, "Compare jurisdictions. Give me an objective answer." But as a litigator, I know that I don't just want objective answers. I want to argue. I either want to argue, to support my argument, or I want to oppose the other side's argument. So to do that, we built a skill, a prompt. So we prompt to say, here's a proposition. I either support that proposition, or I oppose that proposition. And the way that we do that is to take an argument to be able to essentially prompt to be able to say, give me the other side of that argument. And this is a way that we can be able to then give real cases, real statutes, real regulations, that give the other side of that argument, and then the large language model, with our prompting crafts the other side of the argument for the end user. This is important for two ways. Way number one is we are both a web interface and a word interface. So you can imagine typing in your Word document, opposing counsel has argued X, highlighting x, and then saying to vLex, "Why don't you give me the other side of that argument?" and then within the Word plugin to be able to find the other side of that argument that then you can paste into your brief. So that's use case number one, to be able to essentially augment your opposition to the other side's argument. Use case number two is to essentially shadow box with yourself to input here's the proposition I'm going to be making. Give me the other side of that argument to anticipate what the other side might be arguing to. And then to

essentially, now I can head that argument off at the pass, to say, "Your honor, opposing counsel may argue x, but that is invalid and unlogical. Let me tell you why." So as a way that we could be able to shadow box with yourself to essentially tighten up your arguments, to make them even stronger.

Steve Poor
So, Damien, one of the concerns people have about the use of generative AI models is the disclosure of confidential, proprietary information for training purposes, or, I mean, there's all sorts of issues, particularly around ChatGPT. I assume you guys have dealt with that by making this a proprietary enterprise model.

Damien Riehl
That's exactly right. Yes. And as a bit of my background, for you readers that don't know me, I spent a lot of my time in cybersecurity. One of the things I did in cybersecurity was that Facebook hired me and my company to investigate Cambridge Analytica, and so I spent a lot of my time around some of the smartest people in the world in cybersecurity. So the concerns that you raise about security are utmost in my mind as well. So I can say confidently that any inputs into the system is not used to train a model or anything like that that is used locally within us, to be able to answer the question asked, and nothing more than that.

Steve Poor
Awesome. So you talk a little bit about your background. Let's talk a little bit about your journey. Because you start off, you go to law school, you clerk, you work for a law firm, you clerk, you work for a law firm. It looks all very typical. And then you leave to go to work for Thomson Reuters, which seems like a right turn or a left turn or a U turn, I don't know which it is, but a variance from a normal path one would expect. Tell us a bit about that moment in your professional career.

Damien Riehl
Sure, I will tell you that that moment for my wife, was a very trepidatious moment. She said, What have you done? What have you done? You are ascending the ranks of this really prestigious law firm. You're representing victims of Bernie Madoff. You're suing JP Morgan of the mortgage backed security crisis. Why would you throw that all away, especially after a judicial clerkship, which is very prestigious and to just build legal tech. And I just read Tomorrow's Lawyers by Susskind.

Steve Poor
Oh, Susskind.

Damien Riehl
So he's launched the career of many legal tech person. I'm amongst them. And I thought I had in my brain, I'd been coding since 1985, so I had an idea for legal tech in my brain for the last 10 years of practice. And I thought this is coming. There is going to be a way that machines are currently really good at searching words at that point in 2015 and I know that they're going to get much better at searching words, and they're probably going to be able to synthesize words as well. I knew that in 2015 and any risk in one's career, and that was certainly a risk for me, to jump from the practice of law to legal tech. You have the risk of doing the thing, but there's also the risk of staying. And I balanced that

risk, and I did the calculation that the risk of staying maybe is is to me, riskier than the risk of jumping to a thing that I know I could be able to contribute to the science that is, through legal tech, in a way that maybe others wouldn't be able to. So I thought that my opportunity in being able to contribute to legal tech is maybe higher. So in 2015 I pitched Thomson Reuters, I said, "Here's a legal tech idea that I think can change the world. You should build it and hire me." And they were then dumb enough to do that, so I worked with helped lead a team of many lawyers and coders to do a big thing.

Steve Poor
And what was that thing?

Damien Riehl
I have not disclosure agreements that I can't disclose.

Steve Poor
Okay, fair enough.

Damien Riehl
But I would say that it was a, it was a game changing thing,

Steve Poor
Okay, fair enough. Fair enough. Then you wound up at Fastcase with with a stop at one of the Aon companies. What took you to fastcase Was it, was it Ed, or was it their mission? They are, continue to be, but certainly, were a fabulous, fabulous company.

Damien Riehl
Indeed. Yeah, I'd known Ed for a bunch of years at that point, and so I always told him, "Hey, I want to work with you, because you're a good human being. You're fighting the good fight. You're democratizing the law. And we were both do gooders in that way." And so I was at that point, working for Strauss Friedberg, an Aon company, doing cybersecurity, spending 16 hour days on Facebook's campus with data scientists and flying Monday through Friday to Silicon Valley. And I was ready. I thought, if I'm going to jump from cybersecurity, this would be a good time to jump. And there's nobody in legal tech that I want to work with more than Ed Walters, and then I got to know Phil Rosenthal too. So it was really the trust that I had in Ed Walters, and the trust that I knew that they were doing the right thing with trying to democratize the law, and that they could be nimbler than their competition and being able to do things that maybe others would not be able to because of their size. And I also knew that to be--I wanted to go to a place I knew in 2015 I wanted to work in a company that has legal data. That is, you know, data is the new oil, and if you don't have the oil, I didn't want to work for you. So, in 2015, I wanted to work for Thomson Reuters because they had a big oil field. And I said, "Ed, I want to work with you because you're nimble and you've got a massive oil field, just like everybody else does." And now, of course, come March of this year, we merged with vLex, where we now have the largest oil field in the world, not just for US law, but UK law and EU law and Latin American law, African law, Asian Law, Pacific Law. So really, data is the new oil, and we've got a billion legal documents worldwide that now we can play with.

Steve Poor
And tell us about your role at vLex now. You're Solutions Champion.

Damien Riehl
I am, that is a made up title, because I have a position that is made up. Part of my job is getting up at 7am and working with the brilliant minds of Angel, who is in Barcelona, who is our Chief Technology Officer, and Robin, who is in London, who is our Chief Product. And they and I essentially bounce ideas off each other to say, how are we going to build better things? That is, we do prompt engineering. We think through how to build products. So that's arguably the best part of my day. And then I spend the rest of my day talking to people externally, to say, here are the cool things that we built, like I'm talking with you now, to be able to say we're building these things. But the best part of my job is then I say to my users, what else should we be building? And my users say, "Oh, it'd be really cool if you built x." And then I get to be able to take that back and 7am the next morning, talk to my Barcelona and London friends, to be able to say, "Hey, we should really build x." So my job is Solutions Champion in that I build products, and then I champion those solutions to my users, and then I take the users' ideas and I champion those solutions back to my product team. So there's a symbiosis that is really--I don't know of anybody else in my role in the industry, and I think I might have the best job in legal technology.

Steve Poor
I was going to say, wait a minute, how did you get that gig? That sounds fantastic.

Damien Riehl
That's right. It's a made up title for a made up job. And I was told by a career counselors decades ago that you make your own luck. And I tend I try to make my own job in the way, and I feel pretty lucky in being able to do that.

Steve Poor
Let's talk about one of your other passions, which is SALI. Because I know, I assume all our listeners know what SALI is, but maybe you could for the for the couple that don't, maybe you could sort of give us a little bit of background as to the alliance and how you got involved in it.

Damien Riehl
Sure, SALI Alliance is a nonprofit. I'm a volunteer for that nonprofit, and everything that we do is free and open source. And what SALI is is, think, a taxonomy, an ontology, of everything that matters to the substance of law and to the business of law. So, for example, if you say breach of contract motion to dismiss in the Southern District of New York, each of those is a SALI tag merger agreement with force majeure clause. Those are SALI tags. Those are the substance of law, and then the business of law, is it a flat fee case, or is it an hourly case? If there's an hourly if it's an hourly case, is there a collar, or is there a cap? Each of those is a SALI tag. So we have, when I joined SALI, we had 1000 tags that matter to the substance and business of law, and I built that up from 1000 to in 2022 we had 10,000 and then, as of yesterday, we have now have 14,400 tags that matter to the substance of law and to the business of law. And those tags are being used by tiny companies like Thomson, Reuters, like LexisNexis, like Bloomberg, like iManage, like night documents and like some of the largest law firms in the world, and what they're doing is for things like breach of contract motion to dismiss in the Southern

District of New York. As you are pushing and pulling data from your law firm to your vendor A to vendor B, who you know vendor a might be your document management system, and vendor B might be your financial system, and vendor C might be your experience management system. All of those systems now speak the same data language, where you can push and pull data amongst everyone. So everyone is using the same language for motion to dismiss breach of contract, Southern District of New York. So this is a data standard that is standardizing every legal concept, both the substance of law and the business of law, and is being used by this is not a visual podcast, but it's being used by every major name of every major company that you work with as a law firm, and some of the largest law firms in the world. And worldwide, we have African, Indian, UK, German all around the world. They're using this data standard, and we're actually applying, we will soon be applying for ISO standard to be a true ISO standard, to be able to say we are the legal data standard. So I'm a volunteer for this nonprofit that over the last few years has gotten gangbusters success. And if you'd told me five years ago that I could have gotten Thomson Reuters and Lexus and Bloomberg and vLex and iManage and documents to agree upon a standard. I would have told you, you're crazy, but we've done that.

Steve Poor
Which is really incredible. So question: in a world of generative AI, as these products become online, which enhances our ability to retrieve documents and access them with more granularity, tell us the importance of this common tagging methodology in a world where the technology is continuing to evolve.

Damien Riehl
Sure, one of the aspects of large language models is I gave you option one and option two before, and Option two is really saying, Here's a subset of documents that are the things like I care about, and now synthesize these documents and be able to give me a new thing. What that's called is retrieval augmented generation, and so what SALI's tags are is to say, give me all the motions to dismiss for breach of contract in the Southern District of New York. Now, I can get this subset of documents that the large language model doesn't have to go through a trillion documents like GPT4 did, but only has to go through 25 documents like mine that matter. So SALI, what it does is able to constrain the data set to a manageable number so to reduce hallucinations, to give the right output. And so that's thing number one. And thing number two is that you can be able to run those as pre processing steps. That is, a vendor like me could be able to find all the motions to dismiss for breach of contract in the Southern District of New York without having to use the large language model, you can actually do that with traditional ways. Because how many ways are there to say motion to dismiss? I would say maybe two. Motion to dismiss. But if you're in California, it's called a demur. And so this we in SALI have accommodated motion to dismiss and demur, so you could use regular old Boolean queries to say if motion to dismiss or demur. Tag it up with these SALI tags, and now you have that tag for retrieval augmented generation. So that's thing number one, that matters. Thing Number two is that the interoperability piece DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT talks to financial, talks to experience management, you have to have a unique identifier for each of those things for them to talk together. For that interoperability, part of it. That's not possible with large language models, only possible with Sally.

Steve Poor

So I can already hear the groans of some of our listeners thinking about how they've been using uniform task codes that are, frankly, not all that useful because they're too broad and there's too much abuse of the system. But they're thinking, how on earth do I convert over to a better system? I know from our prior conversations that there's a way you've solved that problem, but tell us about that.

Damien Riehl
I have, and like a good lawyer, you haven't asked a question that you don't know the answer to. So yes, indeed, when I was a litigator, I used the universal UTBMS, the ABA task codes, frequently, and whenever I would do L3-30, which was deposition, I would say, are we using this to. Be able to see how much, how expensive this deposition is, because I know a deposition. Am I taking the deposition, or am I defending the deposition, or am I merely observing the deposition? Each of those are three different price points. And then, is it an expert deposition, or is it a fact witness, or is it a 30 b6 corporate representative? Each of those would have different price points. And then, is it a patent case, or is it a slip and fall case? Those would have different price points, too. And the UTBMS doesn't have any of those variables, but Sally has every single one of those variables. So we have mapped the UTBMS to all of our things. And so, L3-30, the one UTBMS is mapped to fact, witness, expert witness. 30 B6 it is mapped to taking a deposition, defending the deposition, observing deposition, is mapped to slip and fall, et cetera. And then your groans, I can hear through the future listeners as they're coming through my headphones. The groans are saying, I don't want to have to tag up that you've taken the deposition versus defended the deposition. And the good news is that large language models make that unnecessary. If humans are tagging things up, you're doing it wrong. Because machines can go through, and I know of many companies that are going through time entries to say, the time entry says, took deposition of expert, so and so, then you could be able to say, oh, taking deposition expert. And you know, that's a slip and fall case, because that's on that. So if humans are tagging these things up, you're doing it wrong. Machines can do it these days.

Steve Poor
Yes, they can. It's a different world now than it was just five years ago, isn't it?

Damien Riehl
It is. And you know, when people say, you know, I've used ChatGPT, and it's not quite there yet, I don't think it's that great. I think they're not really seeing what I just described, that there are so many problems that we need to solve that, you know, lawyers don't want to spend their time tagging up what kind of document is this. They don't want to tag up what kind of matter is this? And we can essentially use large language models like GPT that underlies ChatGPT. We can use GPT in these language models to tag things up more expeditiously and without human intervention and so and then once we take all the motions to dismiss for breach of contract in the Southern District of New York, then we can use retrieval augmented generation, to say, let's export a new motion to dismiss for breach of contract in the southern district, based upon these winning motions in the past. That is the future, and that is what we're building right now. But to be able to find the winning motions to dismiss for breach of contract in the Southern District of New York, you need the oil to do that. And you know, at DocAlarm, we have 770, 5 million documents, motions, briefs, pleadings, orders. That is my playground, that we've already extracted the motions to dismiss, we've already extracted, if they've been granted or denied. We've already extracted Judge Smith, who is in the Southern District, and now I'm able to say, "Give

me statistically ... take these 45 motions to dismiss for judge Smith, that have won and craft me a new motion that is statistically likely to win for this judge for this cause of action, for this jurisdiction. And that is what the large language models are promising, that people that are just saying, ChatGPT isn't quite there yet, they don't quite understand.

Steve Poor
Hopefully they'll learn soon, because it does promise that kind of result. Let's talk about yet another passion of yours. You are co-founder of All the Music, which is just an awesome just an awesome thing. You've got a wonderful TED talk out there. I encourage our listeners to turn in to, but tell us about All the Music. Tell us what it is and what got you interested in this.

Damien Riehl
Sure, All the Music is me ending a 12 hour day at Facebook and going back to the hotel lounge with my buddy Noah, and US drinking beer and saying, I said to Noah, I said, "Noah, you know how we can brute force a password by going, AAA, AAB, AAC. I said, what if we could do that with music? What if we could go do Ray, dodo to me and mathematically exhaust every melody that's ever been and every melody that ever can be." And he said, "eff ya, let's do that." Except he didn't say eff. And so, then what we did that night is we went up and we got his laptop, and we brute forced 3000 melodies in about 25 seconds. And we after that proof of concept, we've now made 471 billion melodies with a b, which we wrote to disc, and once they're written to disc under the copyright law, they're copyrighted. So we copyrighted 471 billion melodies, and then we placed all those melodies in the public domain to help protect "You stole my melody lawsuit" defendants, and so that TED Talk that now has been seen about 2 million times in its different incarnations, every defendant before my talk has lost. After my talk, every defendant has largely used my arguments and has won. So that is Katy Perry has used my argument. Led Zeppelin, Ed Sheeran, all of them after my talk have used my argument, saying, "Perhaps this melody that you're suing me over is unoriginal, therefore un copyrightable." And the courts have all agreed post. So there is a correlation versus causation aspect of this. No one has cited my work, but there's a very strong correlation that everyone before me is lost and everyone after me has won.

Steve Poor
You can't be a good friend of the plaintiff's bar on this one, can you?

Damien Riehl
Well, that's so I have a. Friend who works in entertainment law in New York, and he said, Damien, you know that almost all of these plaintiffs in these lawsuits are taking these cases on contingency, because they think, you know, before my talk, everyone was going by the George Harrison case, where George Harrison was found to subconsciously infringe The Chiffons. And if you think about he they, he said, You know, I believe the court said, "I believe you, George, that you didn't mean to infringe, but what I think you did was subconsciously infringe The Chiffons." And if you think about that now, every defendant after George Harrison has had to prove a negative, to have to say that I have never heard this song, and proving a negative philosophically is impossible. You can't show that you've never heard a song over the supermarket radio, over that never heard someone hold their phone up and say, listen to this song. You can't prove that you've never heard it. So every defendant before me has lost, and it's in sure case for a contingency fee lawyer, because it's 100% win rate. Either I get a settlement quick, or

I get a win in courts. But after my talk now, so far, everybody I've helped every defendant, and we've had 100% win rate on the defendant side. So that makes a much less appetizing case for me as a contingency food lawyer that now it's much, much harder slog. Maybe I'm going to be on the hook for all my fees that I've done, and maybe it's not a sure bet like it used to be.

Steve Poor
You said you're sitting there over beers after a long day at Facebook. How does this idea pop into your head? It's It's so fascinating to me how people come up with these incredibly creative ideas that you think about it after it's explained to you, and you go, Oh, right, that makes sense. But was it just a light bulb going off?

Damien Riehl
It's part of my background as being I have a bachelor's degree in music. I was a voice major, and I had a minor in percussion, and then I'm a lawyer, right? And I'm also a coder, so taking the music plus law plus technology, and putting them together is kind of what sparked this epiphany that I was, you know, I was dealing with brute forcing a password, and I thought, hey, music is code, right? MIDI is a way you represent music, and so it's connecting those disparate things to be able to say, you know, between the music and the tech, wouldn't it be cool if we could do it? And then after a few minutes, my lawyer brain kicked in and said, Oh, I remember that George Harrison case that I learned about in law school that seemed really unfair, that he was told to subconsciously infringe. Because in what other cases has the defendant have to prove a negative? That never happens. So it connected the three prongs of my music plus technology plus law to do this, and this actually applies to, now with our large language model future, it was an effect of my liberal arts education. The whole point of liberal arts education is to connect disparate topics and to be able to make connections where other people don't necessarily see connections. So as large language models are able to write at a postgraduate level and maybe be able to do science better than scientists can do it. I think we need our liberal arts education more than ever, and I'm encouraging my son and my children to go into liberal arts, because we need the creative thinking, the connecting of disparate things, music plus science, plus mathematics plus law plus the other social sciences, to make these kind of connections that large language models and others can't yet make. But for a while, we as humanity can use the liberal arts to be able to make those otherwise unknown, disparate connections.

Steve Poor
I think that's a fabulous point. I don't think I've heard anybody sort of connect the dots. Pardon me for stealing your phrase quite that way. How does that translate into law, school education, in your view, in a world of generative AI? What changes need to happen there?

Damien Riehl
I've talked a lot about this to some of the largest law firms in the world, and I would love to talk to academics in the world, but I think that the law firms are faced with two options. Option number one that we've been doing for a while is I as a partner assign an associate, that associate churns for a couple of days on a thing, and then they come back. That's option one. Large language model ... I as a partner can ask my trusty large language model to be able to say, give me a draft briefed with all my facts, and then it's not going to take two days. It's going to take 20 seconds. And then I as a partner can iterate on

this. So if that happens, how many are we going to move from the Cravath model of one partner and dozens of associates? Are we going to move closer to maybe one partner, one associate, or maybe one partner and zero associates, one partner per matter. And so if we lose associates that way, two questions come up. Question number one is, what's going to happen to those associates? And I would say maybe an answer to that first question is: Maybe they help serve the 80% of legal needs that are unmet today because of the Access to Justice problem that we have today, that maybe they could be able to use large language models to serve that population in a more efficient way. That's thing number one. But thing number two to your question as to what should academics be thinking about. If we go from a 12 associates to one partner model to a one associate one partner model, and I am a prospective law student, and I am going to spend $200,000 on my law school education, if I see the writing on the wall, am I going to spend that $200,000 if you know my odds of working for big law today are one in 100 right? If there's 1% chance of me winning today the associate lottery, how about when those associates are cut in half or less? So am I going. Spend that $200,000 at that law school. So I think this is an existential question for law schools is number 1: Am I teaching the things that I should be teaching? And number two: What is the viability of my model if the smartest people are not going to take that chance as associates go away?

Steve Poor
Yeah, it is an existential question, because it's as you're talking about moving from one to 12 to one to one or one to zero. That works in the short term, where you've got partners who have been trained and have experience and have the ability to connect the dots and provide that type of value-added service. But I think one of the things law firms and corporate legal departments will struggle with is, how do you train that next generation of partners or senior lawyers? How do you give them the experience and the exposure to these concepts that allow them to exercise their judgment in a way that's augmented by technology but not replaced by technology?

Damien Riehl
Yeah, that is the right question to ask, because, of course, the future is the youngest in our profession or the the newest to our profession? And that is the right question to ask. And I'm reminded of ... I graduated from law school in 2002 back in the day that we were still being taught how to research in books, and my librarians in law school were saying, if you don't research in books, you're doing it wrong, because not everybody can afford Westlaw or Lexus, because at that point it cost $20 to be able to download an opinion, something that Ed and Phil remedied, but they said you need to look in the books to be able to do that. And so I looked in the books and I shepherdized manually, and it took me a really long time to do both of those things. Did those things make me a better lawyer? And the answer is, obviously not. Going through the slog of going through books and shepherdizing manually did not make me a better lawyer. All it did was essentially delay the part of being a lawyer that is really being a lawyer. So if you fast forward now to our large language model, future is reading through 100 cases to land on the three cases that really matter and then draft a memorandum of those three cases. Is that making me a better lawyer than being able to ask a question of say, Vincent AI, and be able to quickly find those three cases in seconds, not hours, and then to read those three cases and have a memorandum that I can then augment and be able to add more to it, that is, the slog of it isn't necessarily making a better lawyer. It's just making the technology has now enabled me to be a better lawyer now. And the third point, how do we train people that otherwise aren't, you know, how do I train

the associates to be the partners of the future? I think what I've just described in those previous two anecdotes are essentially how you become a partner. But now, I, as an associate, don't have to rest with having just question number one under my belt. That would have maybe taken me eight hours to answer that question number one, but after three minutes, I can answer question number one, and move on to question number two, and three and four and 10 and 20. And so, in those 10 hours, now I could have answered 20 questions, which is now making me a better lawyer, because I know through data science that the data scientists say the answer is not in question number one, the answer is to say, Oh, look at these results. Now I'm going to answer your question. Number two, what if we slice the data this way. Oh, isn't that interesting? Now let's do another slice. And so answering questions two through 20 is the art of lawyering, and we, just as young associates, haven't been able to do that because it's been taking 10 hours to do it. Maybe if it takes two minutes now, we can get to question 20 to make me a better lawyer. There's always that, yeah, Minnesota and I hope to be readmitted to their council very soon. And yes, hopefully our robot overlords will not take us over.

Steve Poor
Well, let's hope so. There's a lot of existential questions out there that have to be answered as the technology evolves. Damien, we've hit our time. I can't tell you how much I've enjoyed the conversation. Thank you so much for talking to me. And next time, we'll get to the autonomous self-driving cars work you're doing. Well, thank you and thank you for joining.

Damien Riehl
Thank you so much, Steve, it's really I've been a fan of your podcast for many years, and I'm thrilled and honored that you have me on so thank you so much.

Steve Poor
Thanks for listening to Pioneers and Pathfinders. Be sure to visit thepioneerpodcast.com for show notes and more episodes, and don't forget to subscribe to our podcast on your favorite platform.