

Pioneers and Pathfinders: Dr. Eva Bruch

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Steve Poor

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

This week, we're joined by Dr. Eva Bruch. Based in Spain, Dr. Bruch is a lawyer, strategic consultant, and partner at LOIS—a consultancy focused on legal operations and the digital transformation of corporate legal departments and law firms. For more than two decades, Dr. Bruch has been working at the intersection of strategy, technology, and the legal profession. At LOIS, she helps organizations adopt technology and AI in ways that are practical and tailored to their specific needs, rather than relying on one-size-fits all solutions. She is also a faculty advisor at the Digital Legal Exchange, a global nonprofit that brings together general counsel, legal professionals, and business leaders to learn and collaborate on digital transformation. Finally, she serves on the Mutuality Foundation's Youth Council, a think tank focused on entrepreneurship and talent development within the legal profession.

In our conversation, Dr. Bruch shares the moment she decided to leave traditional legal practice and focus on digital transformation, what legal professionals should be thinking about as they integrate AI into their work, and the critical role senior leadership plays in driving meaningful change. She also offers thoughtful perspectives on how AI should be regulated within the legal profession. Let's take a listen.

Eva, thank you so much for joining. It's such a delight to meet you. I look forward to our chat.

Dr. Eva Bruch

Thank you, Stephen. Thanks for your invitation. I'm so happy to be here with you today.

Steve Poor

Yeah, you're joining us from Barcelona, one of my favorite cities in the world.

Dr. Eva Bruch

Thank you. It is very nice indeed.

Steve Poor

Well, let's talk a little bit about your your journey. You're a transformational leader, you've been a teacher, got a PhD in communications. You're a lawyer. You practice law, you've worked in legal process outsourcing. I could go on and on and on. As you look back on it, what are the threads that sort of put your various exploits together? What's a connective tissue for your career? Why start as a lawyer?

Dr. Eva Bruch

I always thought that I wanted to be a lawyer, and the thing is that while practicing as a lawyer in a midsize law firm in Barcelona, I don't know how, but I end up working in a very big company with a lot of small companies, not that small. But one of the companies was an LPO, a legal process outsourcer. I was not working there. I was working at the law firm owned by this company. And all of a sudden, one day, I just came across to the LPO, and I'd never seen something like this before in my in my life, everything was automated. Everything was process based. I was doing my contracts, I was doing preparing my title leads, I was sending people to the registers for this, and that was a game changer for me. So at this precise moment I still remember, I'm very clear in my mind. I said, Wow, I really want it in

my day to day, I want to work like this. And well, I did. I started to introduce some processes and things like this in my my day to day job, and all of a sudden I decide, okay, I don't want to do law anymore. I just want to help law firms embrace technology and processes and things like this. That was 20 years ago.

Steve Poor

If my notes are right, that's like early 2000s.

Dr. Eva Bruch

Early 2000s Yeah, that was 2002, 2003 when I make that click? And yes, then I started my career as a digital transformation professional. But as you can imagine, 20 years ago, law firms and Spanish law firms were not really ready or prepared to do the change. So I had a tough time at the beginning, until 2014 when I attended brain band law in New York. I don't know if you remember that special and big event when I met such amazing professionals, and I think that was a point where things started to change, and law firms started to think, Well, maybe it's the time to do something. So that was a changing point in my career when I could really, really focus, and law firms started to be more prepared to do this technology change and embrace, you know, digital transformation, and start thinking about their processes, not a lot, but they started.

Steve Poor

So, you had a 10 years or so in the wilderness, so to speak with the LPO, where you're waiting was a struggle early on. What did you learn from that? What lessons did that 10 year period up until 2014 leave with you?

Dr. Eva Bruch

That's a very interesting question. Stephen, I learned that things were not that complicated in law, at least not all of them. Some things could be really automated. I was very proud of myself when I prepared, you know, a title lead for any kind of business, not very complicated business, but that was absolutely able to be automated. And the work I was proudly doing as a lawyer next to me, the parent company, some paralegal was doing exactly the same, or even a little bit more complex work, legal work, legal work in terms of preparing some kind of documents, very automated, and even calculating some taxes. And that was shocking to me. It was, oh my gosh, why am I losing time doing these things that can be automated, that has low value? I didn't know the value was low. I thought my value was amazing, but this is what I learned. There's no value anymore in doing this. The value is in somewhere else. So this is what I learned. That was my takeaway from that period.

Steve Poor

That's so interesting, because we see the discussion now multiplied by dozens with regard to generative AI with lawyers talking about, what value do I bring? And it's now not in just preparing documents, it's in analyzing and thinking. And so you must see similar dynamics going on in your current work.

Dr. Eva Bruch

Exactly. The thing is that now, the speed of change is tremendous, and everybody's talking about it. 10 years ago, nobody talked about it. Just a few people were talking about it. Some general counsels and managers at law firms were starting to think about it. Not a lot of them, but right now, even the solo practitioner is starting to think about it. I think this is really a game changer, and they have to be prepared for what's coming. It's really shocking.

Steve Poor

What do they need to do to be prepared, from an organizational, human standpoint? Put the actual technology aside for a moment, just what's the impact of it going to be?

Dr. Eva Bruch

The impact is going to be huge. I think even the business model are going business models are going to be impacted by Gen AI. And right now, I see some two layers of things to be done. First layer would be okay, start using AI. Start to think how you can use that tool to be more efficient, to improve your processes, to be more productive. This is one thing, and there's a lot still a lot of work to do in this basic layer, but this is something that needs to be done, and I think this is what bigger law firms are starting to do or starting to realize that there's a second layer more important in which they have to start thinking about how AI will be embedded as a structure in their day to day processes, value delivery, client relationships everywhere in the law firm, how AI will impact the world business model in terms of permitting them to make different questions. Let me put you in an example. Right now, we use AI to have summary, to create an email, to prepare some litigation material, for example, or to contrast or to confront some litigation material. But in the future, I don't know if it's going to be a near future or maybe a mid term future. Some firms, the most prepared law firms, will use AI to create future scenarios. For example, if I make that decision, how will this impact my business? If I launch this service, how will this impact my profitability? Things like this, or which are the wrong decisions that I'm taking, AI will be able to support in this? I think this is what will happen. I don't know if it's going to be at the end of AI.

Steve Poor

The agents are talking to one another currently, and they're plotting against us, so we'll soon be working for our robot overlords. But the dynamic you point out is, I think, an important one, and I think it makes the transformation challenge even more difficult in the minds of lawyers, because we've talked about AI is going to take off the routine work and leave you with the high level work. You're talking about AI moving into higher level thinking, higher level analysis. That must be scary to people you talk to.

Dr. Eva Bruch

They are scared. Exactly some of them, they are really scared about lawyer substitution, which is a global debate, will AI substitute lawyers. I think somehow it's going to happen, because some processes, some services, some things that lawyers are actually doing will be automated, and the lawyers doing this will not do it anymore, because AI will do it, but those lawyers will have another job which is taking. We need a human in the loop right now, but in the near future, no lawyer will be needed in this process, but they will do some other things. We will need lawyers capable of understanding AI, understanding law, putting the two things together, making sure everything is working properly, having a more strategic thinking about what we are doing and what AI is doing. So yes, there will be a substitution, but we will have some other roles in legal that lawyers will have to be prepared for. So this is maybe the kind of discussion, or the kind of talking that I like to have with students when I teach, saying, don't be scared. Be prepared for the change, because other skills will be needed in this new scenario. So it's like changing their mind.

Steve Poor

Couple threads I want to pull on from that. On the teaching part, one of the things, at least in the US and I think in the UK certainly I don't know about how the Spanish system works is that it's basically an apprentice system. When you get into, when you start practicing. You do basic work, you follow along behind senior lawyers, you sort of learn by watching and over a period of years, you develop the maturity and judgment and wisdom to grow into this person that you're describing is going to be valued in the future. What are your thoughts in terms of if Gen AI is going to remove that baseline work, that work that people take on while they develop over the years, and it's going to speed that process up?

How do we develop that next generation of lawyers with good judgment, with wisdom, with experience. Is Gen AI going to help us model that out. What are your thoughts on that?

Dr. Eva Bruch

I think so. I think that you exactly mentioned the key point here, because we've got a problem here. We've got a problem because now we've got senior lawyers correcting AI not correcting trainees. So this is a problem, and even the universities, they will have to adapt the way they teach to better prepare their students for the next lawyers' generation. The university will have to adapt what they do, how they do, embrace AI, and I am aware that a lot of them are starting to do this, and law firms will have to change the way they introduce lawyers into the law firms, and prepare them, connect them with AI systems. For example, a doctor, when he's trained, they have to all the steps in medicine, but machines are actually doing a lot of the things, a lot of things, and doctors, doctors are trained in the use of those machines. So something similar will have to happen in legal. Lawyers will have to be trained in the use of AI, and they will have to master using AI with proper judgment on what AI produces. So it's a matter of changing the point of view and what we or how we train those junior lawyers.

Steve Poor

In some sense, the practice is going to become more human, I would think. As the characteristics of lawyers, those that will be in demand will be things like judgment and empathy and interpersonal connections. So it's sort of weird to think of as technology moves on, the profession may require more development of the human traits that go along with the practice of law. Not sure. Law schools are very good at teaching that.

Dr. Eva Bruch

Soft skills, you mean?

Steve Poor

Soft skills, yeah. You talk about doctors. I know at least through the work with digital legal exchange, you work with a lot of different or have exposure and connections with a lot of different industries, professions, as you're going down this digital transformation road. Are there particular industries or sectors or professions that you feel are good exemplars for lawyers, legal profession to look at and follow and learn from.

Dr. Eva Bruch

Good question.

Steve Poor

Or is everybody struggling with the same thing?

Dr. Eva Bruch

Yeah, I think that's the point. I think everybody's struggling with the same problem, which is how we introduce AI and be aware of the speed of change, which is traumatic. That said, I think that they are, there are some industries that are starting to realize how AI can help them faster. For example, logistics industry, they really, I think that they are more capable of envisioning how AI can help them improve their processes and be more efficient. It's more visible to them. That's an example I can bring. Professional services, I think they are more scared of what will happen with AI, what will happen to them because of AI?

Steve Poor

What's the role of senior management in this digital transformation and leading their firms? Do they need to be driving it? Do they need to be just not blocking it? Do they need ... Tell us a little bit of your views on that.

Dr. Eva Bruch

My experience working with law firms, helping them introduce AI, or just doing the digital transformation journey. But precisely in AI, what I see, and I think might be quite the same here in the States, you can tell me at first time they feared about, they were scared about AI. Let's stop this. Let's regulate. This is very European. Let's regulate first. This is our mentality, so let's regulate the use, what they cannot do, what they cannot use, and ways to prevent using AI. No, that's the very first step that they take. But after this, they say, Okay, let's go and look for a proper AI, let's train people. We have in Europe, you have the European AI Act, which makes it is mandatory for every company, for every law firm, especially law firms, to train poor professionals in the use of AI and the risks of AI, because it's a legal obligation. Law firms are doing this. This is the first thing they do, right?

Steve Poor

Trade, yeah, regulated trade on the regulation.

Dr. Eva Bruch

Yes, but we have to do it. So this is what they are doing. But after this, after regulation, they just go and insert and look for a proper AI with a lot of concerns in terms of, you know, sovereignty, where the data is going is, is staying in them? In Europe, is there a chance, a chance that data can be transferred to the United States? Which is, that's the case in all of the cases, because hyperscalers are all American, so we do not have hyperscalers here in Europe. So we always have this risk, and we have to cover this. We like regulation. We do it because of a reason, because there are risks, and we want to be very careful about it. But my opinion, regulation is not that bad, so it is okay. And I feel comfortable when law firms here in Europe do this, and after this, they just start using AI, identifying use cases, sharing the knowledge between the professionals, which is very interesting. And this is something that I feel, I think it's different from before. Professionals were, Okay, this is my focus business. This is my way of doing things. But now I see communities and WhatsApp groups or email groups sharing their best practices, use cases, how to use AI to be more productive, to be more efficient. And I think it's okay. And then I see bigger law firms in Europe, in Spain, starting to think strategically and how the business model is going to be impacted. How can I introduce, or how AI will be introduced at the infrastructure layer, as an infrastructure layer within the law firm, so that we can build this world model that some people are starting to talk about, not a large language model, but the world model, which is like a mirror of my law firm in which I can experiment and test some things. This is very futuristic, but this is exactly the way we are headed with AI.

Steve Poor

It's so interesting. You say that because that's, that's how I would have described the way the US market has moved. You know, initially it was sort of motivated by fear, either fear of what the technology would do, or fear of missing out, either extreme. Either extreme was not good, and it has moved to more infrastructure and strategy. And what does this mean for us going forward? It's interesting the way you describe it.

Dr. Eva Bruch

Thank you.

Steve Poor

So as you sit down and you advise senior leadership, what do you talk to them about as it relates to the business model of law firms. There's been a lot of discussion here in the States about the impact of AI on the fundamental business models of law firms, the pyramid structures, the billable hour, all those fundamental points. What's Top of Mind Over there?

Dr. Eva Bruch

Billable hour is one thing, but I have to say that at least here in Spain, we have done some differences in this, because we were not that used to the billable hour. Some international law firms? Of course, yes, but we use all of them, you know, billing structures, a fixed price, caps, whatever. So this is not that strange for us. So we are not having a lot of trouble with this particular. What they are fearing most is about use cases and confidentiality. This is traumatic. This is what they fear the most, what their professionals are doing. What are they uploading to the system? So this is something that they really care about. And then my job, working with them is trying to define how the business model of the future will look like when a big part of the actual services are going to be automated, how professionals will deal without the automated processes, how clients will perceive this automation, and where they can really add value to the client. Some clients will only want the process to be done in a perfect way. I have to do this. You help me, but I don't care about the professional behind the process. I just want the result, and I will pay small price, maybe not a small price. I will pay just a specific price for this, because I want the process to be okay, to be good, but then there will be some other kind of clients that they want the process as well, but they want the professional because of the trust they have. So I want this professional taking care of my case, because this, this and that. So these are the lawyers are not going. Kind of lawyers are not going to be substituted. I read about last week. I think it was Dennis hassaris. Was him saying all lawyers are going to disappear in a matter of one year. I don't think that. No, some of them will. We talked about it before, but this special relationship between lawyer and client -- we'll still have it for a long time. So and this is where law firm managers have to concentrate their efforts, identifying where this trust is created, where this value is created, and the strategy of law firm has to follow these two paths, two ways automated, very automated, comfortable processes, and not that automated, and really protect this client relationship with some some professionals. And I think the business model of blueprints will evolve in this way. I think that actually, and this is something that Americans started. American law firms started very well, all these automated processes, they were separated from the core business, even branded differently. And it makes sense, because they need another strategy. They need another way of marketing, very different things. I don't know maybe, maybe we will have to join them again, but we are exploring these kind of ideas as futuristic ideas. There will be a second round in this.

Steve Poor

Yeah. What steps should leaders of law firms be doing right now to anticipate this change, to prepare for it, to future proof their law firms?

Dr. Eva Bruch

They have to analyze very well their processes. That's for sure they data. They have to make sure that they have the data well organized, structured, quality data, quality data, and all their processes have to be well documented and structure it. This is the foundation layer for any AI to be able to get embedded into, into the law firm. I still see lots of law firms without data, without technology, without proper document management systems, and lots of them without a knowledge management system, and they pretend to do AI. Okay, you can do AI as a tool to help make a summary, create a summary, or write an email, but you cannot embed AI into your structure, into your law firm without proper km, because, if not, it's just a simple tool that you have. And all the rest of law firms, they have exactly the same tool, so it makes no difference. So if you want to differentiate yourself, you have to rely on what makes you

different, which is your knowledge. We are knowledge professionals, so this is what you have to keep and protect and work.

Steve Poor

That is going to define the winners and losers in this race, isn't it?

Dr. Eva Bruch

I think so.

Steve Poor

Because if you haven't organized and thought through the process and the knowledge management, you're not building on the right base. You're not building your house on the right foundation.

Dr. Eva Bruch

You just hire another tool,

Steve Poor

And you lose all the power.

Dr. Eva Bruch

Yes, because in the large language models, they are you don't own them, and they are all the same. You can make different questions, because this is another differentiation, which is, if you ask properly, well, you have better results, but that's it. No more.

Steve Poor

No, that's right. Well, we're running out of time. What last thoughts do you have to people listening to you, in terms of talking about transformation, journey you've been on? In some sense, you've come full circle back to the LPO lessons you learned in the LPO world when you first practice. Where are we going with all of this?

Dr. Eva Bruch

If I have to be frank, we don't know. We really do not know where we are going with AI. But is it an option to stop? I think it's not. It's not. We have to keep going. We have to keep going. It's not on our hands to stop this. Regulation tries to make some sense on the things that we are doing with AI. I think regulation is really needed. And I worried about some governments not permitting a minimum regulation. And I hear voices from scientifics and even the hyperscalers saying, Maybe we are going too fast with AI. This is another debate, I think. But we as legal leaders, we as law firms, I think that we need to keep going to practice, to try to understand AI, to embrace AI in a way that permits us to stay at the same level, at least at the same level as our competition, trying to cover all the risks, because we have ethical risks, which is very important, and we have regulatory risks as well. So these are very red points. That we have to cover.

Steve Poor

Absolutely. One last question based on something you said earlier. I don't know what's going on in Spain, but in in the US, there are some so called native AI firms that are being started, which are law firms being built based on AI. And then you have the legacy law firms who are struggling with some of the data challenges that you talk about in the transformation. The legacy firms have the benefit of brand and strength and client relationships, and the native AI firms are designed specifically for this technology and be more efficient. If you had to bet at the window for the horse race, which side would you bet on being more successful?

Dr. Eva Bruch

That's a good question. I think those AI law firms are really looking into the future. They have a lot of chances to be successful, and I bet that we will see a lot of them. We will see that both models into the market. So classic law firms will not disappear at all, but those AI law firms will grow. And I think and I bet that we will see like an integration. I think that these AI law firms will start acquiring smaller law firms to just, do you know, like a very Swiss bearing. I think that the model could be quite similar, and we will. I think that we will see some other new and big players into the legal industry because of this. But I don't think the classic model is going to be absolutely dead.

Steve Poor

Nor do I, but we live in interesting times, don't we?

Dr. Eva Bruch

Indeed, indeed, wow, amazing times.

Steve Poor

Eva, thank you so much for the conversation. I really appreciate I know it's I know it's late in the day over there. I appreciate you making time for us.

Dr. Eva Bruch

Thanks to you, Stephen. It's been an absolute pleasure having this conversation with you. Thanks a lot.

Steve Poor

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