

# Pioneers and Pathfinders: Joanna Goodman

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## Steve Poor

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

Today we're joined by Joanna Goodman, a freelance journalist, writer, and author covering technology, business, and media for national publications and major corporate clients. Joanna focuses much of her work on how emerging technologies, especially AI, are reshaping the legal profession. She writes the IT column for *The Law Society Gazette* and contributes regularly to the *Legal Geek* newsletter. She is also a frequent keynote speaker, panel moderator, and podcast host. In fact, back in 2016, she published one of the earliest books examining AI in legal services, entitled *Robots in Law: How Artificial Intelligence is Transforming Legal Services*.

In our discussion, Joanna reflects on what it was like writing about legal AI long before generative AI entered the mainstream. We talk about separating hype from reality in legal tech, the challenges organizations face when trying to adopt new technologies, and why change management and training are often the hardest parts of transformation. She joins us from London. I appreciate her time. Thank you, Joanna.

Joanna, thank you so much for joining us. Welcome to the podcast.

## Joanna Goodman

Thank you for having me.

## Steve Poor

We appreciate you taking the time to join us. So, let's start with a little bit of your background. You've been a journalist, and during most, if not all that time, you focused on the legal profession and even more specifically, legal technology. What is it about those areas that interest you? What led you to that focus?

## Joanna Goodman

I've been a freelance journalist for 20 years. I was originally a political reporter, and then when my son was young, I was working as a sub editor, because the shifts are more predictable. If you're reporting, you have to follow the story, so you never know where you're going to be. So this was a management role, and I've quite surprised myself, because I did rather well. I didn't miss one deadline in five years. So couple of years into the role, friend of ours was doing an MBA and really enjoying it, and he suggested that I apply, because he reckoned I do well in the written assignments. And middle management also is quite tough, so it was quite nice to learn a bit about it, and that's what brought me to IT, and then to legal, because my MBA, I was interested in knowledge, and I did knowledge and information management, and I also did a lot of stats, Business Economics, statistical forecasting and all that turned out to be the perfect background for legal AI, because the first generation of legal AI was based on machine learning and natural language processing, which is basically stats and language so journalists who knew about stats and my dissertation, not so surprising, was about how organizations communicate. So that's a very predictable topic for a journalist, but again, relevant for legal AI, if you think about it, because what does a legal engineer do? They're a conduit between lawyers and technologists, and they're a comms channel, and so is all the AI evangelism that we saw in the last couple of years. For example, it might have made some early adopters overconfident. We're still seeing hallucinations in court. I'm not that keen on the word hallucination--sideline--because it's a

nice way saying it makes stuff up. So when I went freelance after my MBA, I focused on business and media and comms, and I wrote about enterprise tech and sort of how organizations manage their knowledge. And I got into legal by what was then art group, who became my publisher of my book.

**Steve Poor**

Oh, I've worked with those folks before.

**Joanna Goodman**

Ah, yeah. You see, they also had a they had a conference in New York as well, but they had a knowledge conference in New York, and I spoke at that once it was, it was very cool. Anyhow, so, I started writing for them, and I used to work in their office a couple of days a week, mostly because they were really nice, and it was so I could walk from home, and they had a magazine called Managing Partner. And I knew the editor, because he was previously another freelance business journalist, and he commissioned me to write about law so and legal tech, because I was writing enterprise tech. And he said, Oh, would you write in legal tech? One? Okay, and that's how it started. And I also wrote for legal business for a bit, and when their Features Editor moved to the Gazette, so did I, and I've been writing for them for 13 years. So that's the sort of roundabout way I got from writing about politics to writing about management to writing about tech to writing about AI. I've been covering AI pretty much from the first commercial use of it.

**Steve Poor**

In fact, you wrote one of the first books on AI in legal, called Robots In Law, which I think was 2016.

**Joanna Goodman**

It was. It was 10 years ago, and robots in law was kind of a joke. The title, it was my sort of strap line was, well, if you're if you're married, you can't ignore your mother in law, because whether you like her, and you'll get very close, or whether you have a strained relationship with her, she's going to be an important part of your relationship. So I was saying that my prediction was robots would be an important part of law, whether or not you like them.

**Steve Poor**

I love the mother in law analogy. I've never heard that before. It's apt.

**Joanna Goodman**

Exactly, so, and partly I did the whether or not you like them, because I really got a lot of grief when I started writing about about legal AI. If I look back with 10 years hindsight and having been proved to have been prescient, rather than different, and feel a bit differently about it, but the reaction was quite normal, because when I was writing about legal tech before this, in 2016 it wasn't cool. It was a niche of enterprise tech, and enterprise tech wasn't an exciting job. I mean, like I remember writing an early piece about emails and email management. And this wasn't like 100 years ago. This was maybe 18 years ago.

**Steve Poor**

It feels like 100 years ago, though, doesn't it?

**Joanna Goodman**

Yeah. So, I was writing about emails, document management, practice management, so when I suddenly started writing about AI, obviously people reacted, and I remember some really horrible tweets and why this kind of goaded me into writing the book, because I got on Twitter, which is how I found, actually, some of the first legal AI people. So it was useful in those days, for example, I went to

see luminance, pretty much on their first day, because I saw the launch announcement on Twitter and messaged them, and they said, Oh, come, come and come see us. And I, I went to their office the next morning, so in London. So Twitter was good and bad, but they were awful. Anyway, apparently I was an attention seeker, not qualified to write about technology. And at that time, I got a regular column in the Guardian's tech and media page, which is broadsheet newspaper and writing about emerging tech. And I was the Gazette's tech columnist too. So it was just sort of prodding me. So I thought, I either have to shut up, or I have to write a whole book and really, really rattle their books. So I was working in Arc group, and I proposed the book, and they were happy to go with it, and really encouraging. I had a lovely editor who was still working in legal. That's how the book came about. I wasn't being a futurist. I'd kind of seen some demos, and they'd worked. And I thought this, this is going to be something. I went to see Raven, which was, is now part of iManage and Kira, which all the law firms had in the end, and still have as part of LEXIPEDIA now. And I saw the demos, and I thought this stuff works. This has got to become part of the stack. And of course, then it did.

### **Steve Poor**

It's interesting when you think back on it, isn't it, Lexipedia has taken over so much. But some of these initial luminance and Kira and these programs, you forget what groundbreaking technologies they were at the time because they've been so overshadowed by generative AI.

### **Joanna Goodman**

Yeah, that's true.

### **Steve Poor**

You know. And you were writing at a time when most people couldn't spell AI. So as you look back at the book, you look back at 2016, did you predict, sort of the evolution of technology in the way it's happened, and generative AI and agentic AI and all the things we talk about now?

### **Joanna Goodman**

I never predicted generative AI, but nobody did. All the futurists who were speaking at all the events. Nobody did. My predictions. I'm lucky. I'm very lucky because I still have them, because I put my predictions in writing in a book, and I also I've got somebody said this to me. Just recently, I wrote a piece for The Times of London about legal tech startups, and the ones that I thought would be a good would go well. And I got this piece, and I found it again, because one of the people that I featured had actually got a feature, and she said, You remember writing this, and you know, you, you picked my startup as something in 2017, and so I found it, and I wrote this piece called "Next Generation Law Firms and Chatbots Being Poised to Take the Legal Sector by Storm," and I was allowed to pick 10 startups that I thought were going to take over, and that nine of them are still going, and that was in 2017 so I feel really fortunate that I kind of got the right angle At the time, because you don't always. Sometimes it's more luck than judgment. It's having a nose for a story or having a nose for technology. It's a difficult one with generative AI. I was looking at it as soon as it came out, and in 2022 at Christmas time, I was talking to Dan Katz because he was testing it to see if it would pass the US bar exam. And of course, it he eventually made it past the exam. So I immediately again thought, this is this is going to be a game changer for legal but this time it was different. So this time, law tech was already cool, whereas when I first started writing about legal AI, it was enterprise tech. It was it was a niche of enterprise tech. But in 2022 law tech startups were raising serious money. Legal AI was already a thing. It was in all the firms. There was loads of different legal AI, I mentioned two or three, but there was lots of them. And innovation the significant thing, you flagged this up when you sent me your note. Significantly, innovation was a big thing. Law firms already had innovation departments, heads of innovation, various talking innovation heads that would pop up and do things, and they were also in the

startup world, because legal has, as you know, lots of money. So it's easier for legal to invest in a groundbreaking startup than it is for them to change how they work. But this isn't quite what happened.

**Steve Poor**

You've touched on this a little bit, but I'm curious, as a journalist, how do you separate hype from reality, particularly in the world of legal tech, there's so much fluff, there's so much hyperbole, there's so much sometimes fear, sometimes fear of missing out. How do you sort through all of that? What's your methodology? Obviously, it's your experience and your judgment. But how do you apply that to figure out what's real and what's what's a real trend, and what's just people talking?

**Joanna Goodman**

Well, it's actually really difficult. It's getting harder. The people talking thing or legal is an echo chamber. It really is. And when I look at events, a couple of years ago, I went to loads, and this year I'm really not going to loads, because what I do is I look at the agenda and I look at the list of speakers, and if it's all the with all due respect, if it's all the people who are supposedly experts on LinkedIn, it's not worth my taking a day off where I could be working, or I could be having fun and not working to listen to people pontificating honestly. So it is a difficult one, because nobody can really say they're a proper expert in this, because it's changing so fast and the pace of change. So what I tend to do is have a really good look. And also I'm a cynical old bat. So there's two things. So few weeks ago, there was the malt book fiasco that hit all of the legal press and all of the national press. It was on the BBC, and I was following this. I spent the whole weekend watching people make bots and all the weird things they were apparently saying. And then they had the one on the BBC where they said, one of them said something like, Okay, how do I sell my human? Then another one said, Let's make our own language so that we can talk without our humans watching. Because the idea was that it was a social network that only the bots that you could make would go on it and talk to each other. So the AI agents that you would build would go onto this platform, and they would talk only to each other, and the humans could only watch, was the idea. So if you actually think of it from a human management point of view. Well, it's nuts. It's like getting all the staff, if you were working for an organization, to all get on your own social network and moan to each other about work and your managers could watch, even though they couldn't actually participate. So why would you want to gossip about your managers when they could watch. You wouldn't. So the whole concept was a bit strange. So then it said, Let's make our own religion. And then I thought, that's not a bot, that's a person, because there's not a logic of coming up with that. Someone's put it in.

**Steve Poor**

No, there's not, is there?

**Joanna Goodman**

No exactly, if you put a computer program in and said it could hallucinate, which they do, which is, which is to diverge slightly. I mean, hallucination is a feature of generative AI, it's not a bug. So it's something that has to be managed. You can't stop it doing hallucinations because it's part of its creativity. So it's a it's a difficult one, but it's not going to hallucinate something it's not been trained on.

**Steve Poor**

No, in the hallucination piece, you make such an interesting point that it's a feature, not a bug. I think users don't grasp that particular point. I mean. Here in the States, you see all sorts of articles about people filing briefs with made up cases in them. To me, that's not a technology bug problem. That's a human error problem in supervision and management and recognizing that the features of the technology may result in made up cases. Well, go look them up and read them so, you know, they're not made up. I think that's, that's a user education problem.

## **Joanna Goodman**

I agree completely. It's very odd because it's, it's also the way that people compartmentalize AI. I was at an event last year that actually is one that's really nice, and I was speaking after somebody who trains people in legal AI, and I completely changed my opening because of him. And he said, this is the opener, and it was a fun opener. He said, Everybody stand up if you've used AI today, sit down. And some people sat down if you've used it this week. Sit down if you haven't used it at all in the last three weeks stay standing, and there was a few people standing. And he said, Well, how do you manage without using any AI in your work and so on? Which, of course, they do, because all sorts of the apps we use automatically have AI in it. So I got up and we were in a part of the UK, by the seaside, and it wasn't particularly easy to find. By train, it was, but if you were driving, you'd have to, you'd have to look. So I got up, and the first thing I said, the first thing I want to say is, Well done, everyone who got here without Google Maps, because that's, of course, AI. So it's you don't have to go in and be using ChatGPT for something, or Claude, Google Maps is AI. It's about clusters. So if you want to see if there's traffic, you can look at Google Maps and it'll show the road is red because there's lots of other cars there, and that's because there are other people using Google Maps. So it's looking at its cluster of users, and it's analyzing it. But if you use Google Maps, which we all do, for driving or for walking, if it told you to drive off the edge of the road, you wouldn't do it just because it told you to, or if the road was blocked, you wouldn't go, I'll drive just straight through because Google told me to. You would say, oh dear, that one is closed. Let's get it to go again and find us a new route. And that's the analogy for the legal hallucinations. If it tells you something that doesn't look right, check. I use all of them. I use Claude, and I use GPT, and I was doing some research for feature, and I was looking for law firms and barristers chambers who would talk to me about a legal topic, and it found one I'd never heard of, and I'm like, Hmm, see if you exist. So I found them on the internet, but then I phoned them to make sure they were real. I thought, I'm not going to take a chance of looking at a website that might or might not be proper and put it in an article where I'm a journalist. I write commissioned articles, so I have to be able to validate my facts. So I phoned them up. They were actually real, but they didn't give me an interview. So that's that. You have to look at the hallucinations and think about it, and you have to think, Well, is this actually right? But the other thing is, it's part of its creative process, is it looks at what it's trained on, which is on the internet, and it works it out from there, not everything on the internet is true.

## **Steve Poor**

That's that is, that is one of the truest statements I've heard in a long time. Not everything on the internet is, in fact, true as you followed the adoption of legal tech in the industry, particularly over the last few years, since generative AI, since the ChatGPT big bang, you talked a little bit about the evolution of chief innovation officers, but how has management's, law firm management's attitude and approach towards technology changed over the last four or five years?

## **Joanna Goodman**

Well, the difference is there's a lot more technology in the management I mean, there's a lot more technology roles. Technology is front and center, and law firms and legal departments are spending a lot more on it. So it's a much bigger budget, and it's got a much bigger population. You don't just have a CIO and an IT director now, you have all those other jobs to do with AI and innovation. And I think it's also, it's part of the tech stack. A lot of the law firms are using it, or thinking of using it, if you look at various studies, and also one of the reasons for that, which is it's not, it's not really management, per se, but a lot of the reason for that is your your normal legal tech, incumbent vendors are all associated with the cutting-edge AI. So if you look just in my latest pieces, you've got, you know, LexisNexis and Thomson Reuters have already got involved with anthropic legal plugin. So just the day before yesterday, on Tuesday, Thomson Reuters appeared in anthropics, latest vendor and management meeting, and there's a case study, and they've integrated it with CO counsel. It's not integrated, but it's

they've got connectors, and then they've got connectors with LexisNexis, protege. So it's become accepted with the vendors that are the ones that you're used to, the ones that have the legal data. So I think part of the reason it's become integrated is not just the firms to take up. It's the big legal tech vendors have all adopted as well.

### **Steve Poor**

One of the challenges of using technology correctly, and you've followed knowledge management and associated data challenges, for a while, is the managing of underlying information, is the data hygiene, the having access to your information. Do you see the profession getting more sophisticated about that as they're trying to bring these more advanced technologies into the firms?

### **Joanna Goodman**

It's a combination of the vendors and the internal R&D departments and the internal innovation departments, they have a lot of legal engineers, prompt engineers, and they have also their resources behind the firewall so they're not as vulnerable as you'd have think they were, or as they've been at the very beginning, where you're seeing hallucinations in court and where you're seeing the awkward things where the AI wrote it is generally either litigants in person or very small firms where they've just jumped into an AI LLM and gotten to find things and not checked on it. I think with the bigger firms, they have a good team now. It's been three years that they've been dealing with generative AI. So they do have a structure in place in terms of resources and in terms of staff.

### **Steve Poor**

It has sort of moved from what the heck is just happening to us? What is this stuff? What do we do about it, to being a more sophisticated analysis of what the tech stack looks like, and what does it mean for our in our technology infrastructure. How do we mobilize this on behalf of our clients? It must have been an interesting evolution for you to watch as a journalist and talk to professional leaders about.

### **Joanna Goodman**

I don't talk to a lot of leaders who are running firms about this, to be honest. I talk a lot to people who are using it, and people have to make decisions about what to invest in. And I think what's quite difficult at the moment is that, and also, there's hundreds of startups. Legal technology hub found some 885 legal AI startups. So there's a big difficulty about buy your build. Do you build your own? If you can't build your own, what do you buy? How do you invest in this? This is all done by seeds. We've had, obviously the front runners, the agentic platforms, Harvey and ligora, have raised a huge amount of money, and most of the bigger firms have now gone with one or both of those. So it's now changed. It's now become a Thomson Reuters, Lexis Nexis on agentic AI. So the choice is simpler for the big firms, I think the real difficulty is the speed, the speed of which it's moving, because the actual lawyers are having to work with this stuff. So how do you train them? What do you train them on? What's going to happen with the next thing. They just want to get on with their job. You can't completely change how people work. Every five minutes. You have to, you have to work out where you're going. So it's becoming a time to strategize. Like I'm hearing an awful lot about vibe coding. And for me, this is comes back to the do lawyers need to code well? Now they don't. They can do vibe coding now the AI will do the coding for you. So it'll do coding so you don't have to. So, but it's another argument to how, if people are sitting at their desk and they're building agents to do lots of different things, then they're not actually working. So is the time saving worth it? So it's constantly looking at looking at value. And I think the value proposition is quite the difficult one. And I also saw another study that said that the clients didn't see what value they were getting out of it, because they weren't paying less. So what is quality? You've got questions around that. So what is quality? Is the quality of the output better because you're using these tools? Is it faster? If it's better and faster? Is it less expensive? So it's, I think it's, it's a difficult thing to measure. It's become hard. I keep on asking people, this is something I've asked a lot

of people. I say, right, you've invested in this and this and this, and it's really cool. And I can see it works. I watch the demos, and it does things at phenomenal speed. And you can turn around amazing, amazing stuff with it. But what's it replacing? So you've invested in this, what are you not having? It's an extra.

**Steve Poor**

That's a great question. There's so many interesting issues.

**Joanna Goodman**

Yeah. So I'm like, Well, you've got this in your technology stack. What's dropping out of the stack? What don't you need anymore? It's like, when you look on social media, you often see this meme, and it resonates with me because I've been around a long time so and it has all the things you used to have on your desk, like you used to have a phone on your desk, you used to have calendar on the wall behind you. I still have a whiteboard stuck on my window with all the deadlines and things I have to do, because I'm very deadline driven, and last minute, so I have that. But you used to have all those things, and now all those things were on your smartphone. You've got your calendar. You've got too many reminders if necessary. You've got your what used to be in the very olden days. I remember my dad doing the post, and it was really quick. It was much quicker than email. He used to mostly tear it up and Bin it, and he'd keep one or two things and work with them. And now we have emails, so we don't have the post except rubbish and something from the bank and but even the bank is on an app, and we have everything on the phone, and it had all the things you used to have on your desk, and it says we don't have them anymore because we have a smartphone. So I ask law firms and others, okay, you've got this AI that will do all these things for you. What isn't on your desk anymore? And nobody's actually told me, squarely, we don't use that anymore. We've got rid of it. I haven't had one thing. So I think this is why we're still in a transition. We have the extra jobs. We have legal engineers, data analysts, knowledge people, and there are obviously firms are getting rid of some back office staff, but you do have a sort of, okay, what's it actually replacing? What's it replacing, and who's it replacing? Because if you take up old fashioned to circle back to my MBA in strategy, your strategy has got to be: Why does your business exist? It's got to be to promote shareholder value. So you want the business to be adding value. And then you go, your strategy is, where do you want to be, and how do you get there from where you are now? So at the moment, they've got lots of AI, and the AI is changing all the time, like now we have anthropic legal plugins that we didn't have a few weeks ago, and things, things are shifting all the time, but we still got all the old stuff. It's as if we had our smartphone, but we still had the calendar on our desks, and we still had the phone, and we still had all the things we had before stuck on the desk. So I think we're in transition to something different.

**Steve Poor**

I think we are. Joanna, we've run out of time, but you've put me back in the way back machine. I would add a Rolodex to what was on my my desk, which is no longer on my desk. But thank you so much for the time. I really appreciate your insights, and your drawing on your experience has been fascinating. Thank you so much.

**Joanna Goodman**

Well, thank you for having me. It's been great talking, and I really appreciate your interest and hope that we can stay in touch.

**Steve Poor**

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