

Pioneers and Pathfinders: Nicole Bradick Returns

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Steve Poor

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

We're excited to welcome back Nicole Bradick, one of our earliest guests on the podcast. Since last we spoke, a lot has changed. Nicole is now global head of innovation at Factor, following the acquisition of her design and development studio, Theory and Principle. She's also an advisor at both Paladin and LEGA, continuing to help push the boundaries of legal tech and justice innovation.

In this episode, Nicole talks about the transition of Theory and Principle into Factor, and what that's meant for her work. She also shares why it's important to be a healthy skeptic when it comes to new tech, how generative AI might improve access to justice, and what advice she has for anyone looking to build a career in legal tech.

Nicole, my friend, it's good to see you. It's been a while since we've chatted. Thanks for making time for us.

Nicole Bradick

I'm so happy to thanks so much for having me back on.

Steve Poor

Well, you were one of our first guests, I think guest number two, four and a half or five years ago. Yeah, that's right.

Nicole Bradick

It must have been during the pandemic when I was in Mexico.

Steve Poor

Mexico, that's it. It was, it was the pandemic like '21 or so.

Nicole Bradick

Yeah, we fled the country.

Steve Poor

I understand that I we didn't, but in retrospect, probably you made the better decision.

Nicole Bradick

It was a good choice.

Steve Poor

Since that time, you've had some big changes.

Nicole Bradick

Indeed.

Steve Poor

You've sold your company Theory and Principle to Factor. I'm curious. Over the years, you had to have a lot of suitors, and a lot of people expressed interest because of the fabulous work you were doing. What was it about the fit at Factor that sort of led you to take that big step? Because, listen, I know there's money involved, but knowing you, it was more than that. It was it was a business fit. It was how your people fit in. Tell me about how the businesses fit together.

Nicole Bradick

Sure, happy to. It was both a sort of personality fit and a timing fit and a business fit. So all three things sort of came together at the right time. And I didn't build this company to sell it. I really enjoyed running this company. We have, still today, a beautiful culture. We do great work. I have loved every second of running theory in principle. And, you know, I think Gen AI sort of changed all the things as it has for everybody. And really what it changed for us is that, you know, I always really enjoyed running small businesses, and we kept ourselves sort of artificially small, because I wanted very high quality work, and I wanted to keep a really strong culture. And I always felt like by having a small team, we could maintain control over those things. But the challenge in having a small business is that you can't have the type of investment that you need in things like R&D when it comes to major shifts in the market that are required when major things happen, like the advent of Gen AI. So when Gen AI became a thing, we were able to invest a lot in sort of research and understanding around how it changes design, and we had a lot of projects that came in that allowed us to sort of experiment with the change in how lawyers sort of participate with technology, and how the experience of technology changes with Gen AI, but we really couldn't spend the time and energy and effort that was required to dig deep enough into the actual technology and sort of the what's possible. So Factor had kind of the opposite issue. Right Factor is a large organization that does sort of high volume contract support for corporate legal departments. And one of the things that they had been doing is they created the sense collective, which was getting these corporate legal departments together to really talk about the challenges, the opportunities that Gen AI brought to the corporate legal department. And through the SENS collective, they really began to sort of understand what the use cases are, what the needs are, and they began to develop their own sort of internal products to help support their lawyers in doing the work for corporate legal. So what they were able to develop is a very large, robust, effective R&D team who built really, really amazing, impressive software, but they didn't have the product team, the sort of professional software product UX design chops that we have. So they had corporate they had R&D, we had professional product we have, you know, we work with law firms and basically every other corner of the market. We work with law firms. We work with legal tech companies, we work with legal aid. And so bringing those two things together has made a ton of sense, and I've talked to other organizations. I am a very autonomous, independent person, so the thought of having people that are sort of overseeing anything I do always felt a little bit cringy to me, but I really...

Steve Poor

I was gonna ask you about that. You go from being the boss to having a boss. It's not the easiest transition in the world for most people.

Nicole Bradick

You know what? That part of it has been a non issue. Like, I truly like the executive team at Factor and I are, like, very we work incredibly well together, and I have a boss now, Jess Block, who I adore and like, if I could have, like, painted a boss, I would have sort of painted somebody that is just like her. So yeah, I haven't had a boss in like 20 years. And you know, it doesn't really feel like that. It feels like I have some really, really smart colleagues that I can now, like, bounce things off of and and help with strategy and sort of take on new, hard things with so, so that's really, it's actually been really, really exciting and interesting and helpful.

Steve Poor

That's great. I know you had a strong sort of design first philosophy at Theory and Principle, has that evolved? Has that changed in your in a larger organization?

Nicole Bradick

No. So we're still doing the same work we were doing, which is sort of direct design development work for our clients, which has now expanded to corporate legal as well, as well as working on the internal products that Factor uses to do its service work and design still guides everything we do. And I think the things that have changed are that, you know, so much of design around generative solution, generative AI solutions involves, like, programmatic things. So a lot of design is around like, what do we tell the system to do or not do? And that impacts experience. So I think developers are involved very early on, a lot earlier on than we did before. You know, used to be just like design decisions, and then we would bring in developers to discuss feasibility, to discuss, is there a different path we can take that would be sort of, you know, more efficient or whatever, but now it's designers and developers at the very start, talking through the entire experience, and it's, you know, it's things like, you know, we need to worry about, in a lot of it, especially in the legal context, is about risk mitigation. And so what can we build in programmatically to mitigate risk, where we can take the debt decision making away from the users? The user doesn't have to think about, oh, can I upload this document that has client information in it. I don't want them to have to think about it. I want programmatically for it to prevent it, for example. And that's a technology issue, but it's a design decision. So these things have become a lot more intertwined than they used to be, especially as like the sort of experience is becoming less and less visual and tangible. It's a lot more programmatic, if that makes sense?

Steve Poor

No, it does. And I'm curious, you mentioned what I would describe as a user group, user feedback group. I can't recall the name you gave it at Factor, but as you get user input and desire and demand, our experience has been that those user requirements in an age of generative AI are sort of all over the lot from design me program that doesn't use this evil generative AI to design a program that does everything. And so you must have to balance those. Maybe they're not competing, but at least the that diversity of of client demand. How do you how do you go about doing that?

Nicole Bradick

Yeah, so one of the first exercises we do now when we work with clients is really trying to segment their user population, not by partner associate, not by practice group, practice group, but by method of usage, and by power users versus casual users and by level of comfort, those are the more important segmentations than you know, are you transactional or litigation? Are you an IP or are you are you staff or a junior associate? Those types of considerations then allow us to create sort of like multifaceted experiences, so that a power user, somebody who's very comfortable with the technology, somebody who's using it every day, will have a very different experience than somebody who's just coming in every once in a while, is very mistrusting of the system, and sort of needs a little bit more hand holding. You know, software has become so quick to deploy, so dynamic, that we can easily create a multifaceted experience for different types of users within one product.

Steve Poor

So you're now Global Head of innovation, I believe, is your title. And you're now in an organization that's got products and services and talks about being at the intersection of new law and traditional law and in house law. What does innovation look like with all those various forces involved for you?

Nicole Bradick

Yeah, so I think it's we have a really interesting opportunity, because I've always believed that technology all the way through, like human support, like the answer of what is the most efficient, what is the path is always going to exist on a continuum between like technology, self serve technology, all the way through, sort of hand holding with by a lawyer. And I now have at my fingertips, you know, access to 400 lawyers and so we can, like the sky is kind of the limit as to the types of innovations that we can come up with, the types of solutioning that we can help clients with, the ways in which we can solve problems. Because now we have can have technology, but we can also add humans in the loop at any moment in time that we need them. And these are humans that are both skilled lawyers, but also people that we have the ability to sort of train around AI who can understand and sort of really appreciate the level of either risk, low risk versus high risk, the level of review that is needed for various points along workflow. And it really gives us, like all of the opportunity and all of the feedback that we could ever want. So, you know, a client comes to us with a problem, and we all of a sudden have every single tool that we could ever want or need at our disposal to try to solve that.

Steve Poor

That's awesome.

Nicole Bradick

We have what I think is the best product team, legal tech product team in the world. We have now a team of R&D people who deeply understand AI and stay on top of every single tiny little advancement. And I have 400 attorneys.

Steve Poor

How do you deal with the training? 400 attorneys is a good goodly number, and I suspect, being attorneys, they have all of the characteristics that other attorneys have. What does training look like?

What do you need attorneys to understand in order to effectively give you feedback or input or usage of these tools?

Nicole Bradick

So interestingly, one of the things that Factor did at ... So, they had this sense collective and through that, learned a lot about the needs of sort of organizational needs, lawyer needs, and have developed a training program called Sense Maker Academy, which is was developed and sort of reviewed and in collaboration with King's College and Peter Duffy. If you know Peter Duffy...

Steve Poor

I do.

Nicole Bradick

So, it's a like six workshop, five workshop, plus one optional, very hands on training program that allows lawyers to sort of learn within their milieu. If you're a transactional lawyer, you'll learn hands on around like transactional type activities and tasks. If you're a litigator, you learn about AI around litigation type tasks, there are challenges, right? And, you know, some of this is around just building comfort and building confidence and building, you know, these sort of creative muscles. But what we have learned over the years, and we do a lot of like workshoping with law firms and other clients to like help bring lawyers together to sort of generate some creativity around use cases and that sort of thing is that when you give lawyers the ability to be creative, they will take that opportunity. They don't often, in a day to day, day to day work as a lawyer, there's not a lot of opportunity for creativity. So when you give them space and time for creativity, they usually really appreciate it and want it. There's skepticism, but there's also the data that we've received after doing like, a bunch of workshops and and a bunch of user testing and data collection and training, is that lawyers generally accept the inevitability of AI, and with that acceptance of the inevitability comes like a willingness to to sort of ingest the training and do the learning. There's always going to be edge cases of people who who aren't going to do it and are sort of on their way out and say, like, this is, this is not something that's important to me. But I think the thing I try to impress all the time is like, this is a, this is like a one shot big moment, like the universe has changed, and it has changed dramatically. And so there is a requirement for, like, a massive retraining of your brain and re understanding of the universe as you knew it. And that takes time, and that takes investment, and that takes training. It's not like learning the latest edition of Word, you know, it's like those things are annoying and pestering. Like, it's not like that. You need to stop and pause and really figure it out. And then, like, future generations, as they come up, they won't need that, right? They'll they'll have it, they'll know it. But right now, everything has changed, so you have to stop and pause and be intentional and take the time. And that's why the training that Factor has developed is really robust, because you need it. And so we're putting every single person at Factor, lawyers and non lawyers, through this massive training, this sort of five workshop training series.

Steve Poor

You make such an interesting point in there about the inevitability of this product keeps lawyers from being able to avoid it. I hadn't thought about it that way, but that's really the nub of the opportunity, isn't it? They can't avoid it, and so they got to go, Well, I better learn this.

Nicole Bradick

And they generally accept the inevitability. I think the issue remains around trust, and I think that mistrust is healthy, and I honestly don't want us to get to a point where there is total trust. Like, we shouldn't ever get to that point. And in fact, in a lot of the software we're building for law firms, we're encouraging the firms to build in moments of friction, moments for the lawyer to think to themselves, like, Okay, wait, I should take a second and look at this like we're like, doing the opposite of, you know, use we used to want to make everything as seamless as possible, as frictionless as possible, and now we want to build into friction so we don't just rubber stamp things. So we don't just say, okay, okay, okay, right. It's like we want them to stop and think and check and assess. So I think a little bit of healthy skepticism is really, really important. And in our industry, I think it has to stay that way.

Steve Poor

And given lawyers, it's not likely that's characteristic is not likely to change.

Nicole Bradick

Well, I think future generations is the question, right? Like they're going to grow up, they're going to, you know, they're going to be very, very comfortable with all the outputs that GPT is giving them, with respect to, like, planning vacations and going through university and so, you know, whether they bring that into the workplace is ... we'll see.

Steve Poor

You said something. It's interesting. I want to follow up on and you talked about talking to clients about new products and new new strategies, adopting new tools, and you've also got the internal stakeholders to train, to embrace the innovation strategy. Are those challenges from a change management perspective for you similar, or are there differences between those two segments of your user base?

Nicole Bradick

It's quite similar, like on the individual level, individual attorneys need to change mindset and need to change comfort. I think that there's varying degrees of challenges around process change management, and I think as an organization that operates with a bit more of a startup mindset, Factor has a leg up from, you know, a lot of the law firms that we work with, a lot of the corporate legal departments that we work with, because there is inevitably process changes that need to happen to accommodate the efficiency gains around AI workflows. So I think that really is the big difference. And the big challenge is like stepping back and saying, Okay, how do we need to rejigger a process? How do we rethink this entire workflow so that we know we can all we can all appreciate that we can do these things a heck of a lot faster.

Steve Poor

Fill that concept out a little bit. How has generative AI affected the way you've thought about product design and particularly legal workflows?

Nicole Bradick

Yeah, so, a lot of it is especially in the corporate legal department universe, how much do we really need to pass through legal? So right now, there are all these processes that exist in corporate that get log jammed because they sit in a queue and they don't get enough time. So it holds up business, and then business gets frustrated because legal is not reviewing quick enough. But how do we think about it more as taking the knowledge of the legal department, putting it in like, you know, putting it inside an agent, allowing the business to instead communicate with the agent and get feedback from the agent, and then for low risk matters, saying that's good enough, and that's a completely different workflow than anybody's used to, and that's putting the burden, that's shifting the burden from the legal department to marketing to sales, to whomever, and that's also saying, like, Okay, we are comfortable with the level of low risk stuff being essentially addressed by an AI that's working from a playbook, as opposed to being reviewed by a human. But also there's, like, you know, a lot of what Factor does too is like, we have this concept called sense desk, where, let's say, a contract, like routine contracts, will be passed into our AI, and then we'll do like, a quick human QC and pass it back. And like, you know, we could do that 1000 times a day. And so it's kind of like defining where's our risk level for various types of BAU activities, and how do we rethink the workflow? And do we really need the legal department and a lawyer within the legal department to be doing that, even the sort of human in the loop work? And how can we remove that from them so that they're only doing like the really important stuff, and are no longer seen as like a log jam to the rest of the business?

Steve Poor

Putting aside the log jam issue, what's been your experience in the other part? I've seen this argument before. You can operate at the top of your license. You don't have to do work that's beneath your skill level. And yet, it frightens a lot of people that their volume of their work is going to decrease. Am I really going to have a job? Am I really going to have an opportunity to work at higher levels? Have you encountered that or has it been relatively frictionless?

Nicole Bradick

Certainly not within corporate legal departments. I have not. I have yet to encounter a corporate legal department that's like, I don't have nearly enough work. I'm so like, you know, don't take this work away from me, please. Like, I think I've not encountered a legal department that feels like they don't have like, 10 times more work than they can handle. So I've never encountered that amongst corporate legal department. Honestly, I've seen it amongst associates in law firms, partners. I'm not really feeling that yet. I think that there's some challenging interactions that they've been having with their with their clients at law at the law firm level, where clients are leaning on them to do things in different ways, and that makes them uncomfortable, and they're trying to meet the moment, I think, sort of earnestly trying to meet the moment, and trying to figure out how to handle changes in pricing and changes in how they operate as a business. But I don't really see it as like, it's going to take my job. But more like, how do we engage as a business now, which are real concerns.

Steve Poor

It's an interesting moment, isn't it? Because this challenges some of the fundamental precepts upon which law firms make their money. And it's interesting to watch the industry try to come to grips with that. Let me talk about a different segment, because I know that one of the things at Theory and Principle you're very focused on was sort of justice tech and legal aid and that community, and I

assume that's still a passion of yours. How have you seen generative AI impact that segment of the legal ecosystem?

Nicole Bradick

So I would say so far, there's not a ton of impact yet. I see a ton of opportunity though. The kinds of things I see people working on are, you know, the challenges around form generation and getting forms to massive amounts of forums to to the public, and that's, that's a big problem, right? How do make forms easier to fill? How do we keep forms up to date based on changes to courts? So I see a lot of interest and effort happening there. We have used it to help a client take court docket entries that are just like blurbs of text, create some structure out of that text, and then provide like text notifications to clients that they have upcoming hearings, that kind of thing. I think there is, there's a lot of concern about using it for summarization, using it for plain language, using it for all of these things. I would say there's like more concern in the legal aid community than there is on the commercial side. Because I think the challenge is that they have to be really, really careful about making sure they're not putting anyone in a worse position than they started with. And these are people who are going to be self represented and not have access to counsel, right? So it's very different type of environment, right?

Steve Poor

And they don't necessarily have the ability to screen, to double check, to have a sense as to whether with the with the information they're getting from whatever system they're using is accurate or right.

Nicole Bradick

Yes, and that's so I've, like, I've actually did a presentation not too long ago about a way in which I think we can create really easy ways for people to self advocate using Gen AI. And I think there's a ton of opportunity. I think there's just a lot of fear, and there's also, like, a lot of funding that is being retracted, in part because of the Trump administration is taking, you know, is threatening to take back funding over LSC, so I think there's a lot of interest, there's a lot more fear, but I think there's so much opportunity that I'm hoping that we can, we can leverage. I think there is apparently some nefarious use ... Not nefarious, right? It's all I think it's hard to put opinions on all these things, but on the eviction side, there are products out there that are making it easier for landlords to evict.

Steve Poor

Well, that's the way the market works.

Nicole Bradick

Right, that's the way the market works. So, so I think, conversely, I think we need to have products that make it easy for somebody to respond to an eviction notice, easy for people to quickly generate a letter to the landlord if their heat's not working, that sort of thing. And I think we need to be moving faster on the on the justice tech side, and I don't see us moving fast enough, because we're reliant on grant funding. We're reliant on, you know, there's a lot of concerns about not having, you know, a human to oversee these things. There's a lot of concerns and issues that sort of prevent fast movement. And the grant cycles typically are, you know, you put in a grant, it takes, like, a full year before your money comes in. And that's just not the pace in which Gen AI works. No, no, it's not. So it's a really big challenge. And actually, we've, my team has sort of come up with, you know, we're putting together this

concept where, basically a law firm can engage us for a year to just have our team constantly available to build Gen AI solutions throughout the course of the year. And one of the things that we put in there as a suggestion, we're not sure if we're gonna offer this yet, is like, we're calling it like an ethics offset, where, like, for one of these pieces, you could actually pay us to build an application for a legal aid organization as an optional way to use some of that time. I like that. You know, maybe you know, maybe you don't have an idea that month, or maybe you don't you've got some downtime so that we can, we can help legal aid to, like, have things faster and move faster than they have to, than relying on grants funding. So we're playing around with that idea, seeing how we can get more, like, private funding into some of these solutions.

Steve Poor

One of the interesting things to me about looking at the legal aid structure, the ecosystem within there is, there's so many well intentioned actors in there, and maybe I'm just missing it. It's difficult to get coordination between all the various demands of people, and that's got to reflect itself in software and product development. Do you see the same problem? And if so, is there any way to solve that?

Nicole Bradick

I think it is the problem, honestly. I think LSC Legal Services Corporation has sort of become this sort of natural central place, because they issue so many grants around innovation, innovation grants to legal aid organizations only LSD funded ones, and that's been like a \$5 million ish pot of money, but that's created some sort of perverse incentives that, I think, have you know, they've funded some essentially, like, not market stable products that serve Legal Aid, so they're not very good products. And then I think it also has allowed for like pet projects to happen around different legal aids, instead of them all collaborating on, like universal projects that can benefit everyone. So the result is, like, is generally like inferior production instead of like collaborative production. And I say that hesitantly, because there are, you're right. There are so many really, really smart, really, really good people working on this, but they work so much in silos, and sort of this, this sense that, like, where their community, is sort of different from the other communities, but as as an organization that is built for many, many communities, you know, I think there are distinctions, but it's more like rural versus urban, as opposed to like, Southwest versus Northeast, so...

Steve Poor

Right? No, that's right. So I know we're about up against time, but one of the other components of your career has been advising startups and other entrepreneurs. And so when you sit down with somebody who's thinking of going to law school or in a law firm, thinking of changing and going and starting their own business. What types of advice do you give them?

Nicole Bradick

Well, it's interesting right now, because if we're talking specifically about moving into technology, it's a hard time to start a SaaS business. And I would be really nervous about starting a SaaS business right now. So I would be scared. I would just be, I would be scared that, like the models, would subsume anything that you could build right now, you know, the Corel alums would subsume anything you're trying to build right now. I think there's a lot of opportunity on the service side. And I think no one, should be scared of building anything on the service side, because there are not enough. I think service

businesses out there that are serving sort of the legal tech, legal innovation space. And I think everyone just has stars in their eyes about big, giant exits. And I think we've created a really weird universe. And this is a rant that I've been going on a lot ever since I sold my company of like that you're not successful unless you have, like, a \$50 million exit, \$100 million exit that you can talk about, but dreams are made off of \$5 million exits every day, and we're like, embarrassed to talk about them, or we're embarrassed to say, like, if it's sub \$10 million we're embarrassed to call that a success. And that's completely insane to me. And I think if you can build a service business that is a lifestyle business, which is also something that I think we've somehow decided means you're not serious, or you're not dedicated, or you're I don't know. I think it's really foolish, and I think we need to change that entire, that entire concept, and we need to say, like, if you're building a business where you can actually, like, live and support your family, like you're actually doing a great thing, as opposed to, like, something where you have to eat ramen every day. So I think that, like, a little bit of mindset shift is really important. And like, the number one thing I always preach, because it's sort of followed me around, is authenticity. I think especially for female entrepreneurs, it's really, really difficult, especially if you come out of the legal space where, like, sameness is really valued, sameness in sort of presentation, sameness in demeanor, sameness and decorum to stand out, to allow yourself to stand out, to be too feminine, to be too whatever, to worry about everything. And we see the ramifications every day of women being authentic and people finding ways to dislike them or discount them for one reason or another. But I think that if somebody's not going to engage with you or hire you because you're a woman, they're going to do it anyways, people will respond more to you if you are just authentic, and you will gain better, deeper relationships. And in the end, legal is all trust business, and it's all about relationships. Whether you're a SaaS company or you're a service company, it's all about trust, and they need to know who you are, so just do it. Just be who you are. That's always my top advice.

Steve Poor

That's great advice. Nicole, thanks so much for joining us again today. Thanks so much for having me. I look forward to seeing your continued success and all the unique characteristics you bring to the legal marketplace. Congratulations on everything so far, and good luck in the future.

Nicole Bradick

Thank you so much.

Steve Poor

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