

Features

Meet our 2013 Legal Rebels

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By [Terry Carter](#), [Stephanie Francis Ward](#), Rachel Zahorsky



2013 Rebel, Michelle DeStefano, on a Miami beach. Photo by Jason Myers.

Excuse us for waving our own flag, but we are exceedingly proud of our fifth-year selections for the ABA Journal's Legal Rebels.

Our annual honors program for the change leaders of the legal profession has again found, thanks to your nominations, 10 outstanding new members. They join the 81 free thinkers selected in the previous four years of Legal Rebels. And though this year's program was open to anyone in the legal services business, an interesting pattern arose as the final selections were made: Seven of our 10 choices are directly connected to legal education. Well, with the disruptive innovations of technology remolding the practice of law, it's only normal that those charged with training the next generations of legal service providers are reshaping the way those generations are taught and what they learn.

On our list is a law student making law visual. A professor bringing mock competition to transactional practice. Another linking students and mentors from around the world to solve legal problems. A pioneer in law firm incubators now creating an incubator for incubators. A provider of free learning tools for law students teaching students to create computer-based guides for pro se litigants. And two profs whose goal is no less than reinventing the law. Add in an attorney whose trademark search engine bests the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office system while his prices stay low, a general counsel taking outside law firms to school for not knowing their own software, and a lawyer/software engineer invoking the name of Hammurabi as he turns law into computer code. Individually and all together, they are planting their banners on the pinnacle of legal innovation. And they are our Legal Rebels, the class of 2013.

For a deeper look at our 2013 class of Legal Rebels, click [here](#). Throughout the month, we'll be adding full profiles and video interviews of this year's honorees. You can also see an archive of our 81 previous Rebels. And while you're there: Enter our [cartoon caption-writing contest](#), putting your sense of humor to the test against three law-oriented cartoons. Add to our collection of [Box Breakers](#)—simple phrases that can prompt outside-the-box thinking about legal practice. Enjoy the [New Normal](#), our ongoing discussion about the role of innovation in the fast-changing landscape of the law.



Photo of Renee Knake by Wayne Slezak.

RE-INVENTORS

Daniel Martin Katz, 35

Renee Newman Knake, 40

East Lansing, Mich.

"If I was going to stand up in front of my students and really believe that having a legal degree and a career as a lawyer can be among the most fulfilling career choices a person can make," says Michigan State University law professor Renee Newman Knake, "I needed to be doing something to make sure that would be true going forward for future generations of lawyers." So two years ago Knake co-founded Michigan State's Reinvent Law Laboratory with fellow prof Daniel Martin Katz.



Photo of Dan Katz by Wayne Slezak.

Taking a page from Silicon Valley startups, the duo moved swiftly from an initial brainstorm lunch in summer 2011 to securing faculty support and outside funding in spring 2012.

They developed a core curriculum for students that responds to employers' requests for specific jurisprudential skill sets in "pillar" areas of law, technology, design and delivery. They've also pulled off a series of conferences drawing some of the top innovators in legal services—and seen some of their students hired right off the stage.

"The part [of the legal profession] that is actually growing," Katz says, "the Clearspires, the Axioms, legal process outsourcers and software companies—they need people with particular sets of skills, ... who know the law, understand software and technology, and [know] how to mesh the two."

MSU Law dean Joan W. Howarth recruited Katz to be a change agent at her school. "I was especially pleased when Dan took his expertise and his passion to questions about the future of the legal profession and industry," Howarth says, "because he has the skills to be able to think about, write about and push forward any kind of subject."

And as for Knake? "She's part of a group that is revitalizing the field of professional responsibility and the whole profession," Howarth says.

Katz sees expansion of the ReInvent idea to other law schools but admits there's one issue: "If we prove this [model] is successful, there will be a lot of copycats, but the problem is law school faculty don't have the tools; there are no tech skills or design training, no entrepreneurs."

And Knake points to a controversial statistic in a study by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation that challenges the ways traditional American schools prepare students.

"The study said 65 percent of today's elementary school children may end up in jobs that haven't been invented yet," Knake says. "We in the legal profession would be very foolish to think that doesn't apply to us in the here and now."



Photo of Margaret Hagen by Tony Avelar.

LAW IN DESIGN

Margaret Hagen, 33

Stanford, Calif.

Design thinking has finally reached the text-heavy, no-nonsense bastion of law, and recent Stanford Law grad Margaret Hagen is drawing a lot of attention through her method of law and design.

"By the time I was in law school, I was sure from Day One that I was going to try to draw my way through it," says Hagen, who recently began a one-year fellowship teaching and working in Stanford's Hasso Plattner Institute of

Design, known as the D.school.

Visualizing complex facts and ideas began as a soothing approach for Hagan in 2008, when she felt burnt out keyboarding her doctoral thesis. Previously, as an undergrad at the University of Chicago, she'd sketched for fun in class while also taking notes, and she did the same while getting her master's at Central European University in Budapest, Hungary.

Hagan came to law with international human rights work as her goal. But for now she's caught up in creating visual designs to make the law more easily understandable, accessible and rehumanized. At the D.school, Hagan expects to work closely on projects with Ron Dolin, a lawyer and former engineering program manager.

"We'll try to reconceive the problems," Hagan says, "putting his engineering brain and my design brain together."



Photo of Michael Poulshock by Arnold Adler.

CODE OF LAW

Michael Poulshock, 38

Philadelphia

You're likely to know the kind of thing Michael Poulshock does in his day job. His handiwork includes a webpage for the Internal Revenue Service, where users can ask general questions or drill down to find out when they can deduct moving expenses or whether their pension income is taxable.

But on his own time, Poulshock toils at a project that goes far beyond the scope of these business-rule engines. He wants to make large bodies of law and regulation accessible and understandable for all manner of configuration and use by lawyers and nonlawyers.

In something he calls the Hammurabi Project, Poulshock is writing source code for each law, which can then be entered into computers and applied to fact patterns. In many instances, he says, law can be turned into a

mathematical function: If this, then that; if these, then that or those.

While others work on new ways to use the vast amounts of data available, Poulshock simply wants to capture its logic in a way others can use to put it to work.

"We live in the information age, and yet people have no idea what their rights are or even the basic things of law such as the elements of a tort," Poulshock says. "I wanted to solve this gap problem."



Photo of Karl Okamoto by Arnold Adler.

COMPETITIVE DEALS

Karl Okamoto, 51

Philadelphia

Drexel University professor Karl Okamoto put the transactional-training movement on steroids four years ago when he set out to answer a question: Why was there no equivalent of moot court for those interested in transactional law?

"Designing something that is both realistic and engaging with all the various parts, yet doable, proved harder than it first appeared," Okamoto says.

In a competition he dubbed LawMeets, students get fact patterns for a deal and play the roles of buyer, seller and client. Over a period of months, they have conferences; draft, exchange and mark up documents; and then negotiate the deal. Prominent transactional lawyers judge their documents and negotiations. Then the students get to watch the pros haggle over the same terms.

In 2010, teams from 10 law schools competed at Drexel University. By 2011, the number had grown to 30 teams and Okamoto launched a new venture, with 10 teams competing in an intellectual property version of LawMeets. Come 2012, growing popularity spawned five regional competitions and a total of 54 teams, with the winners going

to Philadelphia for a national championship. And this year there were six regional competitions and 74 teams, with finalists going to Drexel.



Photo of Casey Flaherty by Tony Avelar.

PUTTING 'EM TO THE TEST

D. Casey Flaherty, 33

Irvine, Calif.

For D. Casey Flaherty it's a simple request: If outside law firms are going to bill fairly for their work, they should prove how efficiently they can operate.

So Flaherty, Kia Motors America's corporate counsel, gives them a little test. Nothing outrageous—just ways of using software tools that often come free or cheap with desktop computers. Things like Microsoft Word, Excel and PDF tools such as Adobe Acrobat.

Flaherty has audited the skills among nonpartners at some firms doing work for Kia and others auditioning for it. Of 10 he's done, all firms performed miserably except one. "For too many people it doesn't go much beyond treating a computer like a typewriter," he says. "These tools can do so much more."

Flaherty admits that comparing the gain from earning one corporation's legal business to the high cost of extensive computer training at a law firm with hundreds of lawyers makes his test little more than academic. "Right now there isn't any market pressure there. If suddenly a lot of clients are putting pressure on them, they'll do what needs to be done."

Where might that market pressure come from? Well, he's collaborating with Suffolk University Law School's Institute on Law Practice Technology and Innovation to automate the audit so he can give it away to law students and general counsel at other companies.



Photo of John Mayer by Callie Lipkin.

FREEING THE LAW

John Mayer, 52

Chicago

"It's been fun and frustrating," John Mayer says about his work in the sometimes stuffy legal profession. "It's fun pushing the envelope, but frustrating because people do not want to change."

Mayer is now leading what could be a very big change in legal education. The Center for Computer-Assisted Legal Instruction, a nonprofit consortium of law schools, produces online interactive tutorials written by law professors. "It gives students a hypothetical and a flowchart that walks through various choices," says Mayer, who's known for donning whimsical attire at the annual Conference for Law School Computing—dressing up as a race car driver this year and as a Lego figure last year.

Mayer joined CALI in 1994 after seven years as director of computing services at Chicago-Kent College of Law. Shortly after starting, center leaders told him the organization might shut down. For his job interview, Mayer had brought a list of 50 project proposals. Those that came to fruition include software for faculty to write tutorials and book readers like the Franklin AnyBook.

"This was 1994, before widely available Internet," he says. "Faculty were just starting to get PCs on their desktops."

Mayer and his wife, Jane McBride, a lawyer with the state attorney general's office, founded the animal advocacy group Illinois Humane. "When you look at some of the problems these animals face, your problems are small in comparison," he says.



Photo of Raj Abhyanker by Tony Avelar.

MAKING HIS MARK

Raj Abhyanker, 38

Palo Alto, Calif.

No one could say Raj Abhyanker's path to success was an easy one. As an undergraduate engineering student, Abhyanker's parents, Indian immigrants who owned a computer store, went bankrupt and lost the business. His first foray into law school ended after one year: "That was partly because I didn't like it, and partly because I did not have enough money to stay in school." His first engineering gig ended with the dot-bomb. He returned to law school at Arizona State, but after graduation, patent work at law firms was not a good fit. He even started a social network that was purchased by Google—only he had been pushed out of the CEO post four years earlier.

How things have changed. Abhyanker now leads his law firm Legal Force, with offices from Silicon Valley to London, Beijing and Bangalore, India. And his trademark search engine Trademarkia brought in \$7.3 million in 2012, filing about 9,000 trademarks at prices as low as \$484 for the simplest applications.

A patent lawyer who sees himself as an engineer, Abhyanker is also a bricks-and-mortar retailer. His Palo Alto, Calif., storefront is open seven days a week and sells books, legal advice and forms. Spend \$45 at the store and you get a 15-minute attorney consultation on a variety of legal areas.

And yes, all the ups and downs have taught Abhyanker a supreme lesson in entrepreneurship: "I don't feel bad about failure anymore," he says. "I feel bad if I don't try."



Photo of Fred Rooney by Arnold Adler.

FATHER OF INCUBATORS

Fred Rooney, 60

Central Islip, N.Y.

When Fred Rooney graduated from the City University of New York School of Law, his income was so low, he qualified for the services he provided to others as a legal aid lawyer. “We got WIC [food aid], fuel assistance and subsidized day care,” he recalls. “We couldn’t live off my salary.”

A dozen years later he got a heads-up about a CUNY job helping lawyers who wanted to represent the poor but lacked the skills. Rooney used the position to start filling a gaping hole in the law—access for all to legal services—and created a program to train lawyers serving poor and moderate-income clients to become not just good advocates but smart businesspeople too.

He applied what he’d learned from that program into the first law firm incubator, created in 2007 at CUNY. Today, there are 17 such incubators, nine of which he’s been directly involved in creating. At least 15 are on the drawing board around the world.

And in July, Rooney joined Touro College’s Jacob D. Fuchsberg Law Center to head the International Center for Post-Graduate Development & Justice, a national clearinghouse for the law firm incubator and legal residency movement.

“We’ll bring together all the postgraduate programs that have emerged since we started,” Rooney says, “and provide technical training and support to current incubators and schools interested in starting incubators.”



Photo of Michele DeStefano by Jason Myers.

A WORLD OF LAW

Michele DeStefano, 44

Coral Gables, Fla.

When Michele DeStefano's dean at the University of Miami School of Law was looking for ideas about a globalization conference, DeStefano proposed something more than your usual panel of talking heads along a table. Much more. Her idea included student involvement and participant-created projects that would be discussed in person and online.

LawWithoutWalls, the program she founded and co-created with colleague Michael Bossone, is a mostly online offering where law and business students from different nations partner with mentors from both professions. The teams develop Projects of Worth that focus on finding solutions for problems in the legal profession.

This year, 17 other law schools participated in LawWithoutWalls. Law and business schools act as partners, along with the London-headquartered law firm Eversheds. Projects have considered developing things like an app that pairs female lawyers for networking purposes, a school for potential general counsel, and emotional intelligence testing for law students. Work on a 2012 project contributed to development of Chab Dai International's Freedom Collaborative, a global online platform to connect people who work against human trafficking.

"What LawWithoutWalls has done is opened my mind to the idea that people around the world have ideas about how legal services and education can be approached differently," says DeStefano. "I learn more from the students than they do from me."

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