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Inspire.Legal: A New Legal Tech Conference Laser-Focused on Problems, Not Just Solutions

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Author: Joe Green

Sometimes the most impactful events at major legaltech trade shows happen outside the event itself. Just before ILTACON 2018 was officially underway, for example, the Global Legal Blockchain Consortium held its second annual meeting, offering a slew of impressive new demos, proofs of concept, and announcements to a more intimate audience than you were likely to find at ILTA's flagship event.

And, if this history holds, one of the most exciting things coming out of ALM's Legalweek 2019 at the end of this month will be happening the day *after* the event ends.

On that day, February 1, New York Law School will host Inspire.Legal, an "unconference" organized by Christian Lang, the founder of the wildly popular NY Legal Tech Meetup (with almost 1,300 members and counting), who has been described as "alt.legal's maven, connector and salesman."

Lang's motivation for creating a fresh take on the staid legal tech conference of old stemmed from his frustration with the pay-to-play dynamics and commercial nature of many existing conferences, as well as the adverse effects those dynamics tend to have on the candor and focus of the legal innovation discussions at those events.

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Lang's goal for Inspire.Legal seems simple: "Rather than focusing on the newest and shiniest widgets in the room (which all too often feel like solutions in search of problems), let's bring together a diverse range of innovators, technologists, and as many in-the-trenches practicing lawyers as possible to dig in to those seemingly intractable problems standing between us and the most meaningful change."

Inspire.Legal intends to be different from the typical legaltech conference in focus, format and follow-up. Instead of focusing on *solutions*, the event will explore the *problems* the legal industry currently faces. Only by more fully understanding the problems, Lang believes, can we identify the most urgently needed solutions — those that have the potential to truly move the needle.

To that end, every participant in the event has been asked to submit a problem-statement when they register. The event will include a workshop component during which the assembled legaltech innovators, influencers, and decision-makers will curate and flesh out the crowdsourced list of problems. The event will also feature collaborative "un-panels" drilling down into particularly acute problems. In terms of follow-up, the group intends to produce two main outputs — a legal problems report and a "request for startups" list — so participants and others in the legaltech community can carry forward the lessons learned over the course of the day and build upon them.

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"Through collaboration and cross-fertilization across balkanized segments of the legal ecosystem, I believe we can not only deepen out understanding of key problems, we can lay the groundwork for a series of action-oriented, prioritized dialogues to help improve the quality of, and access to, legal services," Lang says. "I've been overwhelmed by how many thoughtful industry leaders and innovators have rallied around the vision and volunteered their time and expertise to the cause."

Facilitators and speakers for the event include current and former law firm managing partners, such as Ralph Baxter (Orrick) and Augie Rakow (Atrium); in-house counsel, like Mirra Levitt (Priori Legal) and Patrick Delaney (PwC); legal academics, including

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Bill Henderson (Indiana), Dan Rodriguez and Dan Linna (Northwestern), and Matt D'Amore (Cornell Tech); practice innovation, legal operations, and knowledge management professionals, such as Phil Bryce (Mayer Brown), David Cambria (Baker McKenzie), James Desjardins (Cravath), and Monet Fauntleroy (White & Case); legal industry analysts, consultants, and commentators, like Bruce MacEwen and Janet Stanton (Adam Smith, Esq.), Richard Tromans (Artificial Lawyer), Jae Um (Six Parsecs), and Nicole Bradick (Theory and Principle); legaltech entrepreneurs, such as Ryan Alshak (Ping), Haley Altman (Doxly), Felicity Conrad (Paladin), and Tunji Williams (dealWIP); and many others (myself included).

Event sponsor Clifford Chance is sending its global head of innovation and business change, Bas Boris Visser, and its newly named CEO of Clifford Chance Applied Solutions, Jeroen Plink, to help lead discussions and provide their perspectives to the group. They will be joined by Joe Borstein, author of Above the Law's alt.legal column and a global director with Thomson Reuters Legal Managed Services, another event sponsor.

"By bringing together the corporate counsel, Big Law leaders, legal technologists, and legal thought leaders, we aim to map the problem space so that resources, brainpower, and capital can flow to where they are needed most," Borstein explains. "The world of legal innovation is like an unguided rocket whose boosters have just kicked in! Our humble goal with Inspire.Legal is to provide a yearly guidance system to ensure that the place we are getting to fast is the place we want to be."

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Joe Green
OF COUNSEL & CHIEF INNOVATION OFFICER
P +1 212 430 3136

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