

# THE **RECORDER**

COMMENTARY

## How *Kaizen* Can Improve Your Law Practice

Elisa Reiter and Daniel Pollack | September 1, 2023



Originally used by the Toyota company in Japan in the 1950s, Kaizen (“good change”) is a philosophy and management approach of continuous improvement that can be applied to various aspects of life, including personal and professional development. Focusing on small, ingrained changes performed on a daily basis, here are some tips for continuously improving with Kaizen for law firms.

1. Get organizational buy-in: To sustain continuous improvement, it is important to instill an understanding of Kaizen as a long-term practice, rather than a management initiative. Everyone in the organization—senior partners, associates, paralegals, accountants, secretaries, runners, law clerks and any other staff—should be involved in the process.
2. Identify issues and opportunities: Continuous positive change involves identifying issues and opportunities for improvement. This can be done by observing the workplace, gathering feedback from employees, and analyzing data. Most importantly, this means accepting challenges to the status quo. For instance, think of the changes wrought by the calculator, the word processor, the telefax machine, the personal computer, paperless offices, and implementing AI in legal work.
3. Implement small, positive changes: Kaizen focuses on applying minute, repetitive changes that result in major improvements over time. These changes should be based on cooperation and commitment and involve all employees. There is a high demand for legal services. Who can best meet client needs in an efficient, friendly, systematic fashion? Is learning by osmosis—when a junior lawyer had the opportunity to shadow a partner and learn at the courthouse—a thing of the past?
4. Measure and evaluate results: After implementing changes, it is important to measure and evaluate the results. This helps to identify whether the changes have been effective and whether further improvements are needed.
5. Create a culture of continuous improvement: Kaizen is not just a tool for improving processes. It is a way of thinking and a culture

that values continuous improvement. By creating a culture of continuous improvement, organizations can sustain improvements over the long term.

Here are some simple and more complex ideas to consider:

- Finding cost savings and ease of motion by going paperless.
- Scheduling lunches and other networking events with ease via calendar invites, including choice of location. Consulting with younger associates for new apps that can benefit the practice.
- Incorporating AI into your practice (ChatGPT, Perplexity AI, Bard AI, AdBeautifulAI, AdCreativeAI).
- Using Clio, TrustMyCase, CaseFox, iTimeKeep, TimeClock Plus for time management.
- Using a trial notebook taking on new dimensions by trying your case from the comfort and ease of your iPad (TrialPad).
- Using FaceAppAI to morph your visage from junior associate to senior partner with a few clicks, rather than via the school of hard knocks. Or, reverse the process as you clamor for an understanding of innovations; and
- Using the same font style for all documents, unless alternatives are mandated (such as when compiling an appellate brief or when dealing with a patent application).

Does Kaizen sound too fluffy and abstract? Here are some popular, inexpensive books that go into more depth:

- [How to Set Goals with Kaizen & Ikigai: A Japanese strategy-setting guide. Focus, Cure Procrastination, & Increase Personal Productivity](#)

- [Kaizen: Advanced Guide of Effective Kaizen Methods and Strategies in the Information Era](#)
- [The Kaizen Pocket Handbook](#)
- [Kaizen: A Comprehensive Beginner's Guide to Learn the Realms of Kaizen from A-Z](#)

Some attorneys and law firms may find they can continuously improve with Kaizen. It is important to remember that Kaizen is a long-term commitment and requires daily effort and dedication to achieve significant improvements over time. Kaizen is about cultivating a constant mindset of honest self-reflection—not too harsh, not too self-congratulatory. Always seeking the next modest challenge.

Time is not simply billable. Time is about always looking for more ways to improve your practice for the sake of your clients. Kaizen may be an approach that helps you make positive, gradual changes that will lead to significant results—and better use of your time.

**Elisa Reiter, J.D.**, is board certified in family law and in child welfare law by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization. Her family is hosting an exchange student through CIEE, and she credits Naoki Kishimoto with enlightening her on the power of Kaizen. Reiter is a senior attorney with Underwood Perkins in Dallas. She is also admitted to practice in the District of Columbia, Massachusetts, and New York.

Contact: [ereiter@uplawtx.com](mailto:ereiter@uplawtx.com).

**Daniel Pollack, MSW, JD**, is a professor at Yeshiva University's School of Social Work in New York City. He was also a commissioner of Game Over: Commission to Protect Youth Athletes, an independent blue-ribbon commission created to examine the institutional responses to sexual

*grooming and abuse by former USA Gymnastics physician Larry Nassar.*  
*Contact: dpollack@yu.edu.*

Original link: [https://www.law.com/therecorder/2023/09/01/how-kaizen-can-improve-your-law-practice/?utm\\_source=dlvr.it&utm\\_medium=twitter](https://www.law.com/therecorder/2023/09/01/how-kaizen-can-improve-your-law-practice/?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter)