

Closing The Gender Gap In AI Adoption: A Lawyer's Guide

By **Tamara Kraljic** (September 10, 2026, 2:00 PM EDT)

Amid a reported gender gap in artificial intelligence adoption, the time for tinkering is over, and the next challenge is ownership.

Lawyers — and particularly female lawyers, who risk falling behind their male colleagues — should think about AI ownership as a series of concentric circles.

The first circle is adoption: learning and using AI effectively. The second is agency: leveraging AI to expand one's influence, expertise and professional opportunities. Beyond that lie broader circles of impact, including building the tools, institutions and regulatory frameworks that will shape not only the legal profession, but society as a whole in the age of AI.



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The First Circle: Adoption

Adoption remains the threshold question: Who is using AI, how intensively, and with what institutional support?

The Persistent Gender Gap

The evidence of a gender gap in AI adoption is striking.[1]

A 2024 study by researchers from Harvard Business School, Stanford University and Berkeley Haas, synthesizing data from approximately 140,000 respondents worldwide, found that women were roughly 20% less likely than men to use generative AI. The disparity appeared across countries, income levels and occupations. One author called its consistency "shocking." [2]

By late 2026, the picture has improved only modestly. An updated Harvard Business School analysis drawing on 76 sources, more than 100 countries and over 300,000 respondents reported adoption rates of 47.8% for men and 39.3% for women. The authors found that the gap had narrowed after ChatGPT's launch, but appeared to stabilize at approximately 16% from early 2025 onward. [3]

U.S.-focused data show the same pattern. A 2026 Lean In survey found that 73% of women and 78% of men had used AI at work; 27% of women, compared with 33% of men, used it daily or constantly as part of their jobs. [4] Institutional reinforcement also differed: 37% of men and 30% of women had been

encouraged by a manager to use AI, while 23% of male users and 18% of female users had been praised for doing so.[5]

No single disparity is overwhelming, but their consistency matters: Women are less likely to use AI, less likely to use it intensively, and less likely to receive encouragement for doing so.

As for the underlying causes for the remaining gap, researchers identify five recurring frictions. Compared to men, women tend to have (1) lower familiarity with AI, (2) more doubts about its usefulness, (3) weaker training and institutional support, (4) more concerns that using it may be perceived as cheating or as being less competent, and (5) heightened attention to privacy and other risks.[6]

The Legal Profession's Missing Measure

The position of female lawyers is harder to determine. A 2024 U.K. survey found that women constituted 53% of law firm lawyers and 61% of in-house counsel, yet only 52% of respondents felt "very well informed" about AI; 17% acknowledged a clear knowledge gap, and 18% could not identify how AI would affect their work.[7]

Admittedly, 2024 was still early in the generative AI era. Since then, legal industry adoption — at an aggregate level — has accelerated.

Law360 Pulse's 2026 AI Survey found that 70% of law firm attorneys use AI at least weekly, and 47% use it three or more times a week — up from 27% in 2025.[8] The same survey showed that the percentage of in-house lawyers using AI three or more times a week had risen to 56%.[9]

Yet leading published U.S. legal industry surveys do not appear to report AI adoption rates regularly by gender. We therefore cannot tell whether female lawyers are keeping pace or whether rapid aggregate growth masks a continuing disparity. The same is true of tracking AI adoption by race, ethnicity or other intersectional categories. That data gap may come as no surprise given the recent — and, some would add, regrettable — retreat from diversity, equity and inclusion commitments.

Even so, for all AI users — regardless of gender or other categorization — adoption is merely a gating issue, not the destination.

The Second Circle: Owning the Career Advantage

Translation, summaries and first drafts are useful. The larger question is how AI can help female lawyers originate business, win cases, build expertise and influence the delivery of legal services.

AI as a Business Development and Growth Tool

AI fluency can sharpen business development in practical ways: generating and testing thought leadership ideas that can be shared on social media;[10] mapping a professional network to identify neglected relationships and sector trends; deploying agents to monitor a client's industry for regulatory, litigation and commercial developments; and using those insights to set business development priorities, budgets and individualized outreach.

It can also lower the preparation barrier to saying yes to business development opportunities as they arise.

For example, before generative AI, preparing for a prospective client meeting could require days of research and scarce junior resources. AI can now support a preliminary business review, issue spotting and informed questions in a fraction of the time, subject, always, to confidentiality limits and verification.

I experienced this firsthand recently. A last-minute opportunity arose to meet an important prospective client. I said yes without hesitation, not knowing much about the client and their business. While driving to the meeting, I used the voice function of one of my AI applications on my phone — Claude — to work through the company's public-facing business, possible legal concerns and questions to raise.

It was not verified legal analysis, but instead a framework that made the initial conversation possible and gave that opportunity a chance to mature into a relationship.

AI can also provide a useful push when female lawyers consider larger opportunities, such as a promotion or a new role.

Controlled research has found that equally qualified women may be less likely than men to pursue promotion opportunities when qualification standards are ambiguous.[11] The familiar "women apply when they're 100% qualified, men when they're 60%" slogan overstates the evidence, but the underlying caution is real.

Used as a private sparring partner, AI can help female lawyers get comfortable enough to apply and prepare to learn the rest on the job.

For example, a candidate can ask AI to conduct a realistic mock interview, challenge her answers, and identify gaps in how she presents her experience. She can provide publicly available professional profiles of the interviewers so that AI can anticipate the issues they may emphasize and test her responses from their perspectives.

For an internal promotion, she can also incorporate her knowledge of the decision-makers' priorities, working styles and organizational dynamics — without disclosing confidential or sensitive information — to pressure-test her case and prepare for likely questions.

Properly used, AI can serve as an always-available "workplace bestie": one that knows the relevant history and dynamics and is ready to talk through a promotion, professional opportunity or difficult conversation.

AI as a Force Multiplier in Advocacy

Ownership also means using AI to expand what lawyers can accomplish in substantive work. While the growing catalog of sanctions for hallucinated authorities confirms that lawyers must verify AI-assisted work, it does not justify abandoning the technology's legitimate uses.[12]

AI can be especially consequential for solo practitioners confronting institutional opponents with deeper benches — a modern David and Goliath problem in which organization and access to the record can narrow the resource gap.

Attorneys can use AI effectively in substantive work by grounding it in the evidentiary record: organizing voluminous materials, linking factual assertions to their sources, testing competing narratives and identifying gaps that require further investigation.

The lawyer must still verify every proposition, exercise independent judgment and decide what belongs before the court. That approach helped San Diego solo practitioner Joseph McMullen when, with limited assistance, he faced three federal trials in three months against the government.

His use of AI helped him master a heavy evidentiary record and ultimately secure a \$1.5 million win for his clients.[13] While comparable mainstream coverage of female litigators' AI-enabled courtroom victories remains difficult to find, the McMullen story points to a larger ambition: The technology that helped him master the evidentiary record — and ultimately strengthened his advocacy — was built by a female lawyer.

The Outer Circles: Changing the Legal Profession and Our Society at Large

According to an August study using LinkedIn data from approximately 30 countries, including the U.S., women account for only 20% of new "head of AI" hires.[14]

Female lawyers should treat that statistic as a challenge to move beyond becoming expert users. Ownership also means building the tools, institutions and rules that will govern AI in our profession and our society.

Changing the Face of the Profession

The technology used in the victorious civil rights lawyer example described above was created by Jacqueline (Jackie) Schafer.

After beginning her career in litigation at Paul Weiss Rifkind Wharton & Garrison LLP, Schafer held in-house counsel and government litigation roles before founding Clearbrief.[15] Her frustration with the time-consuming work of connecting factual assertions to the evidentiary record and citations informed a source-linked advocacy platform designed around that task.

Schafer's trajectory illustrates a broader form of ownership: drawing on experience inside the legal system to build infrastructure that changes how other lawyers work.

Gabrielle Kohlmeier offers another model. She began in Latham & Watkins LLP's antitrust practice before moving in-house, ultimately becoming the global head for legal innovation and emerging solutions at Verizon and serving in senior American Bar Association roles.[16] She then founded GK Strategic Advisory, which counsels law firms on legal-native strategy, transformation road maps, and the integration of human and AI capabilities.[17]

Her path reflects another form of ownership: applying the judgment developed across private practice, in-house leadership and professional institutions to guide the profession's AI transition.

Across the Atlantic, U.K.-based international disputes lawyer Hanna Roos moved from Freshfields to Latham to Quinn Emanuel, then founded Aavagard, an AI-enabled disputes boutique, and Aavalynx, its dispute intelligence sister company.[18]

Roos described the ambition as more than incremental efficiency: "The opportunity is not to replace lawyers, but to redesign how legal work is done in a way that is far less costly, far more efficient, and gives lawyers their lives back." [19]

Schafer, Kohlmeier and Roos developed demanding legal careers inside big firms and institutions, recognized that AI marked a new chapter for the profession, and chose to help write it.

Beyond the Profession, Shaping the Future of Our Society

And, finally, the ambitions of female lawyers should not stop at changing the face of the legal profession. They have an active role to play in the advent of our AI-powered societies at large.

When generative AI first took off, Mira Murati, the former OpenAI chief technology officer who later founded Thinking Machines Lab, warned that "[t]here are big societal questions that shouldn't be in the hands of technologists alone." [20]

Lawyers are trained to test assumptions, anticipate consequences and advocate for those who bear them. If we do not enter these conversations, AI's rules will be shaped without enough of that discipline.

This is not a blank slate: AI already has powerful owners, embedded assumptions and biases, well studied by leading researchers and computer scientists such as Elham Tabassi, Timnit Gebru and Joy Buolamwini. [21] Despite it all, today we remain in an institution-building moment.

Female attorneys bring knowledge that technical expertise alone cannot supply. Many see at close range how institutional choices affect children, aging parents, working families and people with limited power to challenge automated decisions.

That granular knowledge, combined with advocacy, coalition-building and institutional design, belongs in schools, eldercare organizations, bar associations, corporate boards and public bodies. We should be asking concrete questions: Whose interests does a system serve? Who was excluded from its design? What happens when it fails? Who is accountable?

This work is best done through networks, not in isolation. Lawyers can organize and participate in responsible-AI programs through local and national bars and associations, including the ABA Center for Innovation and ABA Commission on Women in the Profession. [22]

On an international level, the International Bar Association's recently launched Artificial Intelligence Institute adds a global channel focused on responsible governance and inclusive cooperation. [23]

Female lawyers should do more than participate in the AI economy: We should help build it and decide what it — and the society developing around it — will value. Ownership begins with adoption, expands into career agency and influence, and culminates in collective leadership directed toward the profession and the public good.

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[1] Tamara Kraljic, From Gap to Gains: Women Lawyers, AI, and the Future of Law, *Women in Law* (2026), <https://rdb.manz.at/document/rdb.tso.Llwilj20260002>. The article cited Nicholas G. Otis et al., *Global Evidence on Gender Gaps and Generative AI*, Harvard Business School Working Paper No. 25-023 (2024).

[2] Lisa Ward, Why Women Are Using ChatGPT, Other AI Less Than Men, *Wall St. J.* (Aug. 30, 2025), <https://www.wsj.com/tech/ai/ai-gender-gap-b3b0d89c>.

[3] Katelyn Cranney, Solène Delecourt & Rembrand Koning, *The Gender Divide in Generative AI: A Global Challenge [Update]*, Harvard Business School Working Paper No. 25-023 (May 2026), <https://aiinstitute.hbs.edu/the-gender-divide-in-generative-ai-a-global-challenge-update>.

[4] Mary Noble-Tolla, New Research: Women Use AI Less Often at Work and Get Less Credit, *LeanIn.Org* (June 5, 2026) (survey of 1,015 nationally representative U.S. adults), <https://leanin.org/research/women-use-ai-less-at-work-and-get-less-credit>.

[5] *Id.*

[6] Katelyn Cranney, Solène Delecourt & Rembrand Koning, *The Gender Divide in Generative AI: A Global Challenge [Update]*, Harvard Business School Working Paper No. 25-023 (May 2026), <https://aiinstitute.hbs.edu/the-gender-divide-in-generative-ai-a-global-challenge-update>.

[7] Linklaters LLP, *No Woman Left Behind: Closing the AI Gender Gap in Law* (2024).

[8] Kevin Penton, What Attorneys Really Think About AI, *Law360 Pulse* (Mar. 31, 2026), <https://www.law360.com/pulse/articles/2454609/what-attorneys-really-think-about-ai->.

[9] *Id.*

[10] With the caveat — particularly necessary today — not to surrender one's personal voice lest professional social media platforms become a thicket of bot-generated and machine-summarized content offering little genuine educational value or human connection.

[11] See Natasha Khullar Relph, *Harvard Research Reveals Hidden Forces Hindering Workplace Advancement for Women*, featuring Katherine B. Coffman, Harvard Business School Institute for Business in Global Society (Apr. 8, 2025), <https://www.hbs.edu/bigs/harvard-research-women-workplace-advancement>.

[12] See, e.g. Mike Scarcella, U.S. Appeals Court Sanctions Lawyers Over AI "Hallucinations," Lack of Candor, *Reuters* (June 3, 2026), <https://www.reuters.com/legal/litigation/us-appeals-court-sanctions-lawyers-over-ai-hallucinations-lack-candor-2026-06-03/>.

[13] Melia Robinson, How This Lawyer Used AI to Help Him Win a \$1.5 Million Case, *Business Insider* (June 23, 2025), <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-lawyer-used-ai-help-win-case-clearbrief-2025-6>.

[14] Matthew Baird, Silvia Lara & Mar Carpanelli, *The Triple Penalty: Mapping the Gender Gap in the AI Economy*, LinkedIn Economic Graph Research Institute (Aug. 2026), <https://delivery-p143253->

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[15] Founder's Story: Jackie Schafer, Clearbrief, Artificial Lawyer (Apr. 25, 2025), <https://www.artificiallawyer.com/2025/04/25/founders-story-jackie-schafer-clearbrief/>.

[16] Biographies, Shaping Tomorrow, Northwestern Pritzker School of Law, <https://www.law.northwestern.edu/research-faculty/gender/shaping-tomorrow/bios>.

[17] GK Strategic Advisory, firm website (describing its strategic advisory work), <https://gkstrategic.com/>.

[18] Hanna Roos, Aavagard (firm biography); Aavagard LLP, Chambers UK 2026, <https://www.aavagard.com/team-members/hanna-roos>.

[19] Patricia Cullen, Why This Top Lawyer Walked Away to Disrupt Legal Tech, Entrepreneur UK (Apr. 27, 2026) (interview with Hanna Roos), <https://uk.entrepreneur.com/entrepreneurs/hanna-roos-aavalyx-legal-tech-interview>.

[20] Courtney Connley, The Steady CTO Shaping the Future of AI—and Steering Her Company to Calmer Waters, Chief, The New Era of Leadership (2024) (quoting Mira Murati: "We have philosophers and ethicists at OpenAI, but I really think there are big societal questions that shouldn't be in the hands of technologists alone"), <https://thenewera.chief.com/winners/mira-murati/>.

[21] Concerns about AI bias long predate the current generative AI wave. Elham Tabassi, former Chief AI Adviser at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) and a member of TIME's inaugural list of the 100 Most Influential People in AI, helped develop NIST's framework for identifying systemic, human, and computational sources of harmful bias. See Reva Schwartz, Leann Down, Adam Jonas & Elham Tabassi, A Proposal for Identifying and Managing Bias in Artificial Intelligence, Draft NIST Special Publication 1270 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.6028/NIST.SP.1270-draft>. Dr. Timnit Gebru, co-founder of Black in AI and a leading voice in AI ethics, has likewise examined how AI systems can perpetuate existing social inequities, a theme she explores in her forthcoming book, *Deep Unlearning: The Rise of AI and the Radicalization of a Tech Idealist* (expected 2027). Dr. Joy Buolamwini, an MIT-trained computer scientist and founder of the Algorithmic Justice League, has documented the human consequences of biased and inadequately accountable AI systems. See Joy Buolamwini, *Unmasking AI: My Mission to Protect What Is Human in a World of Machines* (Random House 2023).

[22] For example, the Center for Innovation has collaborated with the ABA Commission on Women in the Profession on 21 Days of AI: A Grit and Growth Mindset Challenge. Launched on September 30, 2025, the three-week program uses articles, videos, case studies, and practical exercises to help participants deepen their understanding of generative AI, develop new habits, and strengthen the grit and growth mindset needed to engage with emerging technology. The Challenge is currently being updated for a renewed launch.

Visit https://www.americanbar.org/groups/diversity/women/initiatives_awards/grit-project/ai-grit-challenge-home/wk1-ai-grit-challenge.

[23] International Bar Association, IBA Launches Its Artificial Intelligence Institute to Advance Responsible AI Governance and Inclusive International Cooperation (June 8,

2026), <https://www.ibanet.org/IBA-launches-its-Artificial-Intelligence-Institute-to-advance-responsible-AI-governance-and-inclusive-international-cooperation>.