Replacing Lawyers With Robots?

The innovative minds of Silicon Valley are always looking for ways to improve the lives of consumers with the latest technology. Well, one tech company has turned its sights on the legal industry and the law firm of the future. According to an article in the Washington Post, Atrium is a legal technical start-up that is incorporated in California as a law firm. Located in San Francisco, this futuristic prototype is pairing attorneys with coders and engineers to create an automated legal service that some say will rival the traditional law office in the not-so-far-away future.

Justin Kan is the 34-year-old entrepreneur who thinks that lawyers may one day be replaced with robots. As startup clients work with the firm's attorneys, coders take notes and develop applications in hopes of eventually automating the entire legal system. It may sound like an absurd notion, but automation is quickly expanding among numerous industries. Some experts estimate that 35% of all professionals could eventually be replaced by automated technology systems.

A Bloomberg report from earlier this year highlights how financial giant JPMorgan introduced a software that completes 360,000 hours of legal work in a matter of seconds. Called COIN, this document review system quickly interprets complex commercial loan agreements. This is only the tip of the artificial intelligence iceberg though. Document review, contract creation and trial preparation are all areas where technology is fast encroaching into human territory.

Robot, Esq.?

But could robots really ever replace lawyers? Most attorneys I speak with say no, and the reason for their doubt is very simple – human interaction. The practice of law is much more than writing contracts and searching through documents. It is the assurance a client hears in your voice and the

confidence they see in your eyes. Legal practice is as much about the client's belief in you as their attorney as it is about the tasks you complete for their case.

These are the aspects of legal practice that cannot be duplicated by even the most advanced robot. Though Mr. Kan may have a pretty interesting idea at hand, his dream of a completely automated law office seems pretty unlikely to me.

About Erika Winston:

Erika Winston is a freelance writer with a passion for law. Through her business, The Legal Writing Studio, she helps legal professionals deliver effective written messages. Erika is a regular contributor to TimeSolv and a variety of other publications.