

NASA-level systems thinking Is coming to private law firms

Amid burnout crisis in private law, new legal design methodology emerges.

ST. PETERSBURG, FL, UNITED STATES, February 25, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Burnout](#) is no longer confined to overworked hospital staff or tech employees facing layoffs. It has become commonplace inside private law firms.

According to a [Bloomberg Law survey](#) reported by ABA Journal, lawyers reported experiencing burnout more than half of the time. The strain is particularly acute among solo practitioners and small firms, which make up the majority of law firms in the United States.

Unlike large corporations with dedicated operations teams and formal system architecture, most small law firms were never intentionally designed.

"What happens is firms evolve organically," said Nadine Navarro, co-founder of [Law Firm Architects](#) and law firm owner. "First you rent an office. Then you buy some equipment. You start taking cases and hire staff. You add software as you grow. But there isn't a moment where you step back and truly design how the business should function. You just do it."

Many small firm owners are simultaneously practicing law, managing client relationships, overseeing trust accounts, supervising staff and attempting to implement unfamiliar technology. All without formal business operations training. Over time, the strain begins to show, said Navarro.

That strain is what Luis Barés believes is structural.

Barés is a former service design and client experience leader at NASA and Pfizer, where he worked inside complex, regulated systems. He is also the author of "The Entrepreneur's Playbook: From Ideation to Launch" and "Human-Centered Government: Innovation Through Service Design", books that explore how systems can be intentionally engineered to serve both users and operators.

According to Barés, service design is a methodology used to map how work actually moves through an organization, identify friction points and intentionally engineer systems that align people, processes and technology. Inside Fortune 100 companies, redesigning workflows and

client experience is standard practice. In small private law firms, it is virtually unheard of.

"Legal design applies the same structured systems thinking used at NASA or Fortune 100 to law firms that were never given that level of operational design," said Barés.

Legal design involves mapping the full case lifecycle, from intake through resolution, identifying friction points, clarifying roles and aligning technology with actual workflows. Instead of asking which software to purchase, the methodology asks how the firm is structured and whether that structure supports sustainable growth.

"It's not about adding more tools," Barés said. "It's about designing the operating model first. Once you understand how the firm truly functions, you can automate intelligently."

Navarro said the novelty lies not in the concept of design itself, but in where it is being applied.

"Law has traditionally been slow to adopt operational disciplines that other industries consider standard," she said. "Legal design introduces a formal methodology to a profession that often builds businesses reactively. For small firms especially, the shift can be transformative."

"Many lawyers assume they're overwhelmed because they're not managing their time well enough," said Navarro. "In reality, they're operating inside structures that were never engineered to scale."

As conversations about lawyer attrition and mental health continue, industry observers suggest that operational redesign may become a central theme in the profession's evolution, particularly among small and midsize firms seeking sustainability.

More information about Law Firm Architects and its legal design methodology is available at www.lawfirmarchitects.com.

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