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**LEADERSHIP IS KEY TO LAW FIRM PROSPERITY**

**By: Lawrence M. Kohn**

Leadership. It's an essential part of any practice. If a law firm is to grow, prosper and keep up with shifting economic and social realities, solid leadership has to be in place. But unlike other essential lawyers' skills, this one is not taught in law school. Lawyers learn to lead on the job.

But can one learn to lead? Aren't great leaders born, not made? Not necessarily. True, some people are "born" leaders, just as some people are "born" trial lawyers or "born" basketball players. But the vast majority of successful leaders aren't "born." They have acquired a set of skills available to anyone who cares to learn them; skills you can learn; skills that can be used to your personal advantage and that of your firm. You too can be a leader.

**So What Is Leadership Anyway**

Leadership is difficult to define simply because there are a great many leadership styles. We may think of the "great statesman" model – the Abraham Lincolns or Margaret Thatchers. Or the "entrepreneurial" model – the Lee Iacoccas or Sam Waltons. There are the "charismatic" leaders – the Martin Luther King, Jrs., or the Ghandis. And the "creative" leaders like Albert Einstein or Pablo Picasso. Very different people, very different styles.

But there is one important commonality, which is the basis of all leadership. These diverse people are or were – each in his or her own way – inspirational and visionary. They had an idea for the future in which they believed and in which they convinced others to believe as well. That ability to dream and to inspire others to dream and work to make the dream come true is the basis of leadership. And it's not something that requires a lucky dip in the gene pool. You can develop a vision for your law firm and inspire others to help you make it a reality.

**Introductory Law Firm Leadership**

- Understand the fundamental task of leadership. Dwight Eisenhower defined leadership as "the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it." Your job as a leader is to show people how they can get what they want at the same time you get what you want. Another word for this art is inspiration.

- Visualize yourself as a leader. Remember being a leader doesn't require a senior partnership, a charismatic personality, or a reputation for brilliance. Just picture yourself as having an idea for your firm's future and then successfully implementing that idea. Think of other occasions when you have taken charge – even of only yourself – and accomplished your goals. You've succeeded at other things, why not at leadership?

- Develop a specific dream. Where do you want to be in five years? In 10? Where do you want your law firm to be? What kind of clients do you wish to be servicing? What kind of image in the community do you wish to project? What kind of corporate culture do you wish to foster? How do you propose to achieve these goals? Write down your answers.

- Get passionate about your dream. Really passionate. Leaders are passionate people who believe deeply in what they're doing; and that passion is part of what inspires others to believe in it too. Don't expect the rest of the firm to be excited about the idea if your attitude says, "it might be nice someday to maybe have more corporate clients."

- Demand excellence of yourself in all aspects of your work – especially in the part that relates to your dream. Remember the greeting card company that "cares enough to give the very best." It's inspiring to work with people who give their best. It encourages others to do the same and leads them to the conclusion: "If my partner is putting all this effort into the project, maybe it really is worthwhile."

- Hone your skills. Give yourself a chance to develop your leadership skills on small projects. Become actively involved in some volunteer organization. Run the annual benefit, lead the retreat, chair the committee. Take courses in leadership and communications skills. This kind of in-the-trenches experience is invaluable for building your confidence and your image as a leader.

### **Inspired Leadership**

Inspiration is fundamental to leadership, but how does one go about inspiring others? By acting in an inspirational way. Outstanding performance and passionate belief in your own vision are part of inspiration. But a leader also must:

- Be a listener. Find out about other people's dreams. You're not the only one with ideas for the future. Help the others in your firm to clarify their vision. Give them the sense that you share their dreams. Let them know that their dreams are worthwhile. Let them feel that you are working on their behalf.

- Be an enabler. You lead by helping others to be their best. Encourage others to perform well and instill self-confidence in them. Honest compliments on jobs well done and expressed belief in others' ability is essential. People tend to live up to the expectations others have for them. If you expect excellence, chances are you'll get it. Making others feel good about themselves makes them feel good about you too – and makes them more willing to work with you.

- Be a consensus builder. No two visions for your firm's future will be exactly alike. Find the commonalities among visions. Sell your ideas on that basis. Turn the project into a win-win scenario. Show others how they get what they want when you get what you want.

- Instill a sense of hope. People have to believe that the future is possible, that the goal is achievable, that tomorrow will be better than today (especially when today isn't particularly good). Hope grows with the knowledge that one's aspirations have been heard and that someone else is working to help achieve these dreams.

### **Getting The Job Done**

Once you have arrived at a common set of goals, break the vision down into small, manageable tasks. (If your job is to clear the forest, the first step is to identify one tree that needs to be trimmed.) Breaking the task down this way makes it seem more manageable and builds confidence – yours and your followers. It allows all of you to build on small successes.

Then keep working. Expect that implementing your vision will take some time. Setbacks are inevitable. But keep at it. Allow for mistakes – both your own and those of others. Nobody's perfect. Good leaders let their followers know that mistakes are learning experiences, not capital offenses. Patience and forgiveness are both characteristics of an admirable leadership style.

Finally, the best advice for the would-be leaders is to reject procrastination. Avoid any excuse to delay. Don't wait for another new year. Don't wait for your trial to end. Don't wait to be asked. Dream your dreams, create your plan, work on your skills, and then begin to make things happen.