

Legal leadership: a handbook for future success



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Executive summary

Today's law firm is an entity in flux. Economic and technological disruption – along with a range of other factors – have contributed to this change, meaning that firms are not what they used to be. It is therefore a necessity that the way they are managed also needs to change. This means, among many things, the need to corporatize the running of the firm; a move away from the focus on the billable hour towards more intangible activities such as business development and marketing and – perhaps the most important factor – the development of a new kind of leader within the legal landscape.

The new kind of leader now demanded by a transformed legal profession is not readily forthcoming, however. Legal culture stresses individualism and independence, which is reinforced by firm governance, practice management, and performance management systems that are ill-suited to foster supportive and collaborative leadership practices; lawyers are trained and conditioned to be combative, autonomous, and didactic.¹ To position oneself as a contender in a fast-moving and competitive market, the legal leader of the future must push back against these trends by acting strategically, engaging in people management, investing in their employees, and creating a working environment that places emphasis on communication, teamwork, and growth and development.

Legal leadership: a handbook for future success combines the latest and most relevant intelligence from those on the frontline of law firm leadership and management, to serve as the catalyst for change and the foundation on which a strong leadership practice can be built. Drawing on their expertise and experience, our authors – ranging from behavioral psychologists to senior management figures and professional coaches – present a wide range of competencies and strategies to cultivate as part of a leader's personal and professional development. Whether you are already a member of your firm's senior management, or in a junior position with big aspirations, *Legal leadership: a handbook for future success* provides the essential tools to equip you to become a leader of the future.

Chapter one by Ian Paterson – founding partner at Cote Consultants, an executive coaching firm – furnishes the ideal starting point in addressing change management, a resource essential for any potential or current lawyer leaders in today’s hypercompetitive and fast-paced market. In an industry regularly facing disruption, it is critical to develop psychological adaptiveness and a flexible leadership style. Drawing on research and aspects of developmental psychology, Ian explores seven common leadership styles before presenting a case study from his own professional experience to demonstrate the effectiveness of the “immunity map” – a process to tackle resistance to change – and how to apply this to one’s own practice.

When starting out as a leader – especially in the legal profession, where expectations are high and hesitation or uncertainty is often construed as incompetence – it can be difficult to know how exactly to approach your management position and style. The much-discussed “imposter syndrome” is a challenge faced by many at the beginning of their management career, and a new leader may find themselves experiencing confusion and indecision when it is essential to display decisiveness and authority. Drawing from his extensive experience as an advisor and strategist, Patrick J McKenna asks the five fundamental questions confronting those entering a position of responsibility within their firm and provides guidance on the best ways to navigate them.

Despite a rise in the number of lawyers pursuing alternative career paths, most remain focused on the route to partnership. Statistically the vast majority will not achieve this goal; nonetheless, successful partners do exist. This begs the question: what sets these lawyers apart, and can we identify those with the potential to succeed in advance? A range of factors influences a lawyer’s ability to become a successful law firm leader, with personality being one of these. In chapter three Edward Walker – director at Anima & Atman – discusses six personality traits that have been shown to be linked to leadership potential. The implications for individual lawyer careers and law firm talent management are both subsequently discussed.

One of the myriad ways in which the legal landscape is changing is the transformation of law firm management from a relatively straightforward operational role to a complex and multi-faceted challenge, which encompasses elements of multi-tasking, strategic oversight, governance and compliance, and technological and business innovation. It also requires a more holistic approach than ever before. Utilizing her experience as a “non-lawyer” management professional in a variety of firms, Gabriella O’Rourke – national director, practice management at

Borden Ladner Gervais LLP – argues the case for a shift in focus from individual achievements to collective goals. Chapter four encourages a more collaborative and comprehensive way of working and leading, providing guidance for both lawyers and other professionals seeking to enrich their practice and contribute significantly to their firm's success.

As discussed above, formulating and executing wide-reaching strategies has quickly become a key aspect of any legal leader's role. The ability to lead a firm or group in developing and executing a strategy that will assure its future success is the foremost skill and task a leader must have. However, with most lawyers, this kind of business-oriented thinking does not come naturally. In chapter five, Harry Trueheart – chair emeritus of Nixon Peabody LLP – makes the case that the ability to lead a firm or group in developing and executing a strategy that will assure its future success is the foremost skill and task a leader must have. The chapter then introduces the key steps to follow in developing a strategic plan and a short commentary on organizing its implementation. It flags up some important dos and don'ts along the way.

As a leader in the legal space, it is inevitable that you will be responsible for a group of intelligent, perfectionist and high-achieving lawyers. In all likelihood, they will also be highly autonomous and not naturally inclined to work together collaboratively. In order to be the best manager, it is necessary to effectively harness their talents whilst encouraging teamwork and providing support. It is a difficult task, but one that is addressed in chapter six by Thomas Chalmers and Russell Borland, executive coaches and founding partners of Leading Figures. Utilizing relationship-based leadership frameworks, Chalmers and Borland present practical guidance on how to not only successfully head a high-performing team, but also how to become a great leader in the process.

Most law firm leaders have reached that position because they were successful lawyers or good politicians, or both. Their instincts are generally to favor top-down management; even when they experiment with more inclusive management styles, they revert to this transactional methodology in times of great flux and change, as in today's current market. However, reliance on top-down management is the surest way to fail. In chapter seven, Dr Bob Murray and Dr Alicia Fortinberry – internationally renowned behavioral and neurogenetic scientists – explore the alternatives, including transformational and teal leadership styles, and the practical benefits of their adoption in times of disruption. Current and aspiring leaders are then provided with a workable how-to for changing their leadership style to meet the challenges they face in an increasingly volatile industry.

While it is necessary to do good work and be skilled in your practice – something lawyers hear frequently – it is not enough. The characteristics that will distinguish you in the leadership of your career, and especially if you currently lead or aspire to effectively lead others, are emotional intelligence, a leadership mindset, and influential communication. In chapter eight, Rosalie Chamberlain – principal of Rosalie Chamberlain Consulting & Coaching – delves into the necessity of cultivating these qualities as a leader and shares guidance on how to add these to your toolbox as a means of achieving success.

As a current or future leader, it is critical to inhabit the perspective of those you manage and relate to their goals and motivations. Intergenerational difference is something that can massively affect the way in which people work, and is something that leaders must grasp in order to get the best from their team. In chapter nine, Katherine M Larkin-Wong – a “proud millennial” and associate at Latham & Watkins LLP – encourages leaders to think of their up-and-coming stars in the context of their generation, now the largest section of the workforce. In this chapter, she considers what law firm leaders should be doing to ensure they understand the motivations and preferences of their millennial lawyers in order to help them develop.

Reference

1. J Edwin Dietal (1996), *Leaders' Digest: a Review of the Best Books on Leadership*. Chicago, IL: American Bar Association.

About the authors

Russell Borland is an executive coach and partner of Leading Figures alongside Thomas Chalmers. Prior to moving into coaching, Russell spent much of his career in an investment and benefit consulting firm, where he held a number of senior leadership positions including investment practice manager and firm-wide managing partner. He helped grow the business by encouraging the leaders to focus on building talented, high-performing teams. His coaching is primarily focused on finance and professional services, where he provides one-on-one coaching to leaders and works with teams, often with Thomas. Russell is a qualified coach through the ILM and is also accredited to use the Myers Briggs psychometric.

Thomas Chalmers is an executive coach specialising in the legal, finance and professional services sectors where he has supported several clients in developing their leadership capacity and growing their firm and/or practice. As well as one-on-one executive coaching, he has also supported many clients in securing chair and non-executive roles and is engaged as a team coach at board and senior executive/management level. He is a published children's author, has written for BBC radio, and is a former *Sunday Herald* columnist. Thomas is a partner in Leading Figures alongside Russell Borland. Their clients include the Law Society of Scotland, the Chartered Banker Institute, the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries, and the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland. They work with clients on three areas: growing leadership, improving collaboration across teams/boards, and stimulating growth.

Rosalie Chamberlain is the director of Rosalie Chamberlain Consulting & Coaching. She is a skilled leadership consultant and executive coach, having worked extensively with clients in the legal industry, including the ACC (Association of Corporate Counsel) and the US Securities & Exchange Commission, as well as a broad range of corporate, government, and private industries. She served as the Diversity & Inclusion Manager

for a national AmLaw 100 firm prior to starting her own consulting and coaching business. Rosalie has more than 19 years of experience working with individuals and groups on leadership development and talent management. She is a member of the Committee for Diversity & Inclusion of the National Association of Legal Administrators (ALA) and is featured as one of several selected Top Lawyer Coaches, powered by Diversity Lab. She is also the author of *Conscious Leadership in the Workplace: A Guidebook to Making a Difference One Person at a Time*.

Alicia Fortinberry, PhD (Organizational Psychology) has gained global recognition for her powerful, lasting impact on top-tier law and other organizations and leaders. Drawing on the latest science of human motivation and change, Alicia enables firms to shape strategy and build the right leadership, performance and diverse, cohesive culture. Alicia's clients include internationals such as Herbert Smith Freehills and Allens Linklaters and major national and mid-sized law firms, as well as many Fortune Global 500 corporations. With her partner Dr Bob Murray, Alicia received the highly prestigious American Science Achievement Award and was appointed to head the US government's comprehensive national work stress initiative. Their latest book, *Leading the Future: The new human science of law firm strategy and leadership* (Ark Group, London), guides leaders to apply the latest science to areas such as navigating a firm or practice group through rapid change, managing high performance teams, and understanding the needs and motivators of clients. With Bob she also wrote two international best-sellers *Creating Optimism* and *Raising an Optimistic Child* (McGraw-Hill, New York).

Katherine Larkin-Wong is a litigation and trial associate in the San Francisco office of Latham & Watkins LLP. Katie is a former president and now board emeritus of Ms. JD, and is appointed to the Commission on Women in the Profession of the American Bar Association. She is a frequent writer and speaker on millennial lawyers and diversity in the law, and is herself a proud millennial.

Bob Murray, MBA, PhD is an internationally recognized expert in strategy, leadership, influencing, human motivation, and behavioral change. Bob's insights are based on his wide experience in business as well as his deep knowledge of research in the areas of management, psychology, genetics and neurobiology. Clients include premier global law firms and mid-sized firms in Australia, the UK and Europe, alongside many Fortune Global 500 corporations. With his colleague Dr

Alicia Fortinberry, Bob won the American Science Achievement Award and was appointed to head the Obama Administration's comprehensive national work stress initiative. Bob's latest book with Dr Alicia Fortinberry, *Leading the Future: The new human science of law firm strategy and leadership* (Ark Group, London), shows the potential impact of the new science of being human on organizational success. With Alicia he is also the author of the international best-sellers *Creating Optimism* and *Raising an Optimistic Child* (McGraw-Hill, New York). Dr Bob has lectured at Sydney, Melbourne, Duke, Tufts, South Florida and California State universities.

Patrick J McKenna is an internationally recognized author, lecturer, strategist, and seasoned advisor to the leaders of premier professional service firms. His published articles have appeared in over 50 leading professional journals and his most notable book, *First Among Equals* (2002), topped bestseller lists in the US, Canada and Australia and has been translated into nine languages. He was recently voted by the readers of *Legal Business World* as one of only seven international Thought Leaders (2017). Most recently, McKenna helped launch the first International legal thinktank (LIFT: Legal Institute for Forward Thinking) comprised of futurists, academics and thought leaders from three countries.

Gabriella O'Rourke is currently serving as the national director of practice management for the Commercial Litigation Group for Borden Ladner Gervais LLP (BLG) – the largest Canadian owned and operated full-service law firm. In this role she is accountable for improving total group performance in a number of critical areas, including financial performance (P&L), pricing, business strategy, talent and workforce planning, process improvements and client service standards. Gabriella acts as the most senior operations lead for the practice group, which consists of approximately 150 lawyers and paraprofessionals across five regions. Before BLG, Gabriella served as the director of marketing and business development for the largest regional law firm in Ontario, Canada, and has held National leadership roles in global consulting firms KPMG and Grant Thornton LLP.

Ian Paterson is the founding partner at Cote Consultants. He is an executive coach and consultant, with 30 years of professional services experience as a partner with Andersen, Grant Thornton and EY. At EY Ian led the internal coaching team in the UK and supported the development of coaching across EMEA. Ian formed Cote to help professionals

and their firms perform better, which is achieved through providing a range of services including executive coaching and leadership development programmes. Over two-thirds of Cote's work is in the legal sector, and they have worked with a range of top 50 firms, including Magic Circle. Ian is accredited in the Immunity to Change™ process and has used this to help lawyers expand their leadership capacity.

Harry Trueheart is the chairman emeritus of Nixon Peabody LLP. Before this, he served as chairman, managing partner and CEO of the firm; he is also immediate past chair and CEO of TerraLex, a global network of more than 150 leading business law firms with more than 19,000 lawyers in 100 countries. Under Mr. Trueheart's leadership, Nixon Peabody grew to be a national and international firm with offices in major US and international markets. He led Nixon Peabody to be recognized as a Fortune 100 Best Place to Work. His law practice has focused on dispute resolution, particularly arbitration of international business disputes. He is a Fellow of the College of Commercial Arbitrators, a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators, and an arbitrator for the American Arbitration Association, for which he has also served on ICDR panels. He serves as a mediator for a Federal Court administered mediation program.

Edward Walker is founder and director of Anima & Atman, a consultancy that works with organizations and individuals to help them enact change. Edward has worked in resourcing and talent management for over 10 years, during which time he managed trainee solicitor recruitment for commercial law firm Pinsent Masons and was elected to represent the legal sector on the Advisory Council of the Association of Graduate Recruiters. Now a consultant, he continues to work with law firms and in-house legal teams as a coach and organizational development consultant. Alongside this, Edward undertakes research on work-related topics including leadership, legal secondments, and workplace resilience. Edward holds MScs in Psychology and Organizational Psychology and is an Ashridge-certified executive coach. He also studied Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Brasenose College, Oxford.