

**OVERCOMING THE  
HURDLES TO  
EXECUTING YOUR  
STRATEGIC PLAN**

**McKENNA ON  
LEADING CHANGE IN  
YOUR LAW FIRM**

**WHO LIKES YOU?  
AND WHO DOESN'T?**

**ANNOUNCING:  
SERVING AT THE  
PLEASURE OF MY  
PARTNERS**

**HANDLING PARTNERS  
WITH STRONG VIEWS  
NOTES FROM THE  
LAB**

**THE CHALLENGE OF  
SHARING LEADERSHIP**

**NEW LINKEDIN  
GROUP  
LAW FIRM LEADERS**



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Dear Valued Clients and Friends:

I trust that you enjoyed a most productive and restful summer. I am hopeful that you will find this latest issue of *International Review* to contain a number of practical ideas, tips and techniques on law firm strategy and leadership that you can put to use immediately.

This issue begins with some guidelines on how to better execute your strategic plans and overcome the frustration of the unfortunate infliction that many in firm management suffer – a condition that I’ve come to call seeing SPOTS . . . which is an acronym for Strategic Plans On The Shelf.

From there I am delighted to once again include the insights of my good friend and colleague David Maister. I continue to hear from many of you on how you find David’s writing an excellent catalyst for your leadership reflections.

I’ve included an interview conducted by Nerly East and entitled McKenna On Leading Change In Your Law Firm. Nerly is currently writing a new book on this subject and I’m honored to have my work featured amongst her research. Many of you may know that I have chaired and presented at an annual conference on *Overcoming Lawyers Resistance To Change* for the past three years.

Once again, I am honored to include the thinking of my collaborators at the Managing Partner’s Leadership Advisory Board (the LAB) as they address a question on how one handles the stubborn partner who holds strong beliefs on high-stake topics. And, this article is but one of 18 different chapters that comprise a brand new book published by Thomson Reuters: *Serving At The Pleasure Of My Partners*.

Our final article addresses the challenges of sharing leadership – whether between co-managing partners, a firm leader and their COO, or between a Chair and a CEO.

Finally I would draw your attention to a new group that I have started on LinkedIn specifically and exclusively for law firm leaders. Please have a look at the information on page 22 and come join us.

Patrick J. McKenna

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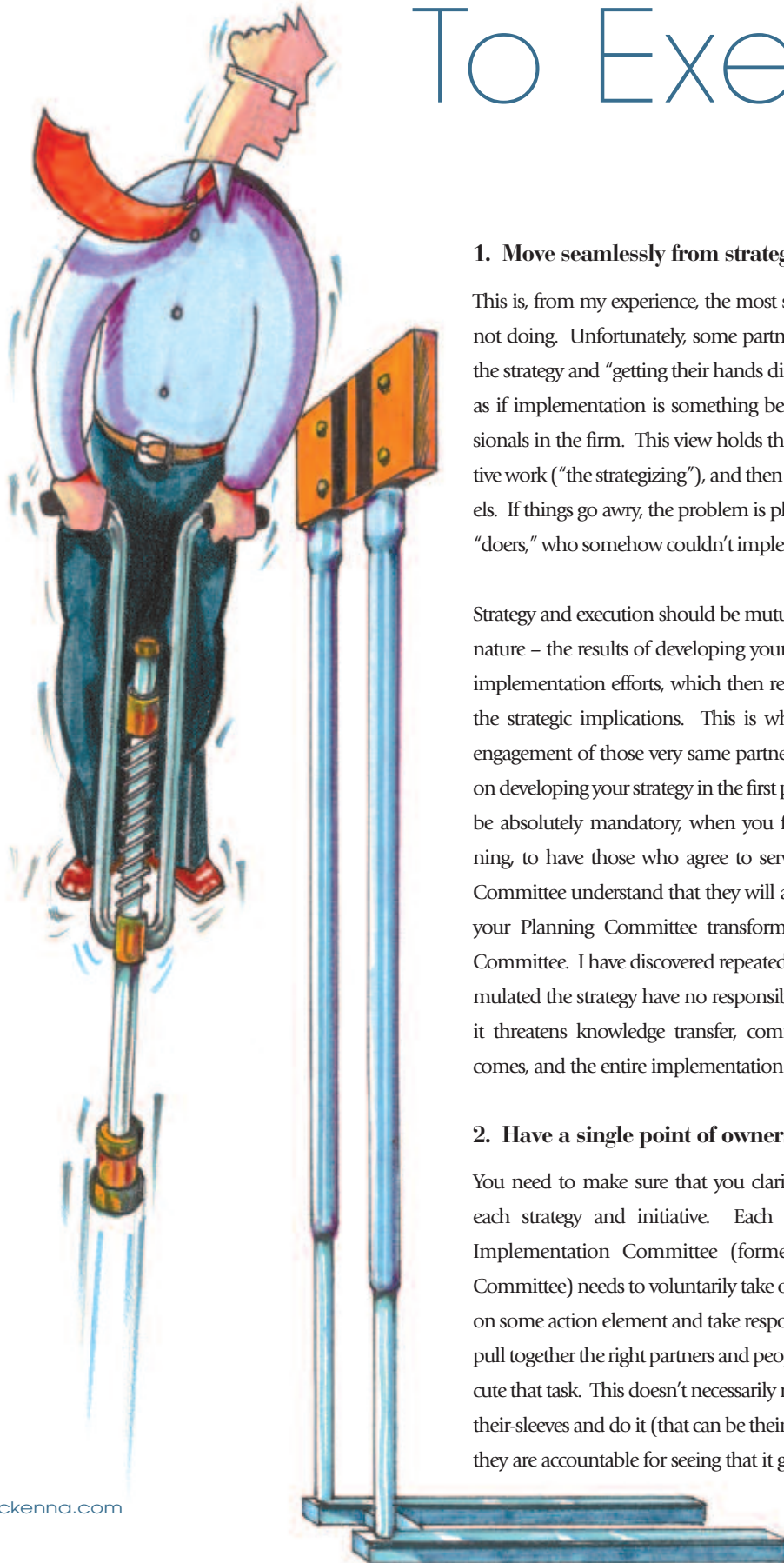
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# Overcoming The Hurdles To Executing

Whenever I think about the effort that is required to go into implementing your firm's strategic plan, I'm reminded of a particular business book title that grabbed my attention when I first saw it... Hope Is Not A Strategy! To effectively transform your best intentions into best practices, there are several common hurdles that you need to overcome. Thinking through the following will help you make the leap.



## 1. Move seamlessly from strategizing to implementing.

This is, from my experience, the most significant hurdle. Planning is not doing. Unfortunately, some partners believe that implementing the strategy and "getting their hands dirty" is beneath them. They act as if implementation is something best left to the non-legal professionals in the firm. This view holds that one group does the innovative work ("the strategizing"), and then hands the ball off to lower levels. If things go awry, the problem is placed squarely at the feet of the "doers," who somehow couldn't implement a "perfectly sound" plan.

Strategy and execution should be mutually dependent and cyclical in nature – the results of developing your strategic plan then drive your implementation efforts, which then requires that you think through the strategic implications. This is why execution needs the active engagement of those very same partners that came together to work on developing your strategy in the first place. In other words, it should be absolutely mandatory, when you first begin your strategic planning, to have those who agree to serve on your Strategic Planning Committee understand that they will also be required to serve when your Planning Committee transforms into your Implementation Committee. I have discovered repeatedly, that if the partners who formulated the strategy have no responsibility for executing the strategy, it threatens knowledge transfer, commitment to sought-after outcomes, and the entire implementation process.

## 2. Have a single point of ownership.

You need to make sure that you clarify specific accountabilities for each strategy and initiative. Each and every member of your Implementation Committee (formerly your Strategic Planning Committee) needs to voluntarily take ownership for being the liaison on some action element and take responsibility for ensuring that they pull together the right partners and people throughout the firm to execute that task. This doesn't necessarily mean that they have to roll-up-their-sleeves and do it (that can be their choice), but it does mean that they are accountable for seeing that it gets done.

# Guidelines for Executing Your Strategic Plan

### 3. Do away with “should”

For many firms, a pervasive problem in executing strategy is the existence of ambiguous wording, measurements and tracking mechanisms. Whenever I review some firm’s prior strategic plan, I am always taken back by reading goal statements like: “We intend to clearly distinguish ourselves and rise above the pack.” Or, how about this for a meaningful strategy statement: “We should create a highly visible positive image in the markets in which we are determined to be a first choice” or “We should systematize cross-selling of practice areas by facilitating identification of client opportunities.” All of these are perhaps very noble in principle, but without any hint of HOW it’s going to get done.

Without clarity, strategic execution becomes directionless work. Morale and support quickly erode. Alternatively, with clarity, you can create tasks and routines that keep incremental actions moving forward with holistic purpose and accountability.

### 4. Involve as many of your partners as possible.

Effective implementation involves many hands. Implementation always involves more people than the initial planning did, so communication throughout the firm or across different practice groups becomes an important ingredient. And linking strategic objectives with the day-to-day objectives at different offices and practice groups can

become a demanding task. The complexity of execution increases as more people are involved – but that involvement is exactly what is needed for you to achieve any sense of alignment and success.

### 5. Think through the sequencing of your action plans.

Sometimes you need to focus your execution efforts by thinking about the timing and pacing. When might it be best to move forward on implementing certain elements? Are you going too fast? Are the action plans you want to move forward in the correct sequence? Think about how you might eat a good gourmet meal. Dessert doesn’t come first; in fact, the same dishes served in the wrong order, will disrupt your entire dining experience. To make your strategy work, you have to observe the right sequence of actions, the right timing and the right pacing.”

*“The complexity of execution increases as more people are involved – but that involvement is exactly what is needed for you to achieve any sense of alignment and success.”*

### 6. Meet on a regular monthly basis.

Implementation requires enormous time. Overall, successfully executing a plan takes even more time than the hours and weeks invested in developing the plan. It can be extraordinarily taxing to the billable-time expectations and client obligations of the partners and others involved. It takes stamina to stay the course—but if you can prepare for what lies ahead, you might just reach your goal.

Execution isn’t a short burst of activity on a quarterly basis; it is a continuous and ongoing exercise. Execution requires persistence in taking small incremental steps; it can’t easily be delegated. The challenge for the members of your implementation committee will be balancing the urgency of day-to-day client obligations and activities, versus the importance of working on the future. There is an old joke that goes, if you give a lawyer a project to work on and ask that they report to the group by this Friday, they will definitely start working on their project sometime of Thursday. Taking that behavior into account, it makes no sense to do anything but meet as an implementation group on a regular monthly basis with short turnaround times.

### 7. Get help when specialist expertise is required

While some firm may get their strategic planning right, they can then struggle with how to specifically transform some element of their plan into executable activities. For example, having a strategy that calls for developing Client

Teams to provide enhanced value and service to a select group of your largest corporate clients is a sound approach. However, determining how best to get your Client Teams working effectively may require expertise that does not currently reside in your firm. In those situations you need to retain the best resource you can find to educate or supplement your internal professionals.

**8. Constantly measure your progress.**

Assign resources and budgets to each initiative. Develop a means (such as a balanced scorecard) to measure results; focus on leading indicators; make the number of metrics small but significant in terms of impacting future goals. Continually monitor implementation to ensure the expected benefits are being realized.

Let's face it. If there was some secret or shortcut to effectively executing your firm's strategy – we would all be doing it. Unfortunately, there isn't. It requires a great deal of dedicated persistent effort and a lot of unbillable time. If there is any good news to this situation, it is that most of your competitors will not be able to pull it off. So can you be the exception and thereby reap the rewards?

CONSIDER A STRATEGIC PLANNING PREMORTEM

You are now at the stage of having worked with the members of your Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) for a number of months to finally come to the point where you have a draft strategic plan that has been approved by the partners and now needs some attention directed toward how certain components will actually be implemented. There are a number of actions contemplated that your fellow Committee members feel are critical and definitely need to be properly executed in order to make a significant difference. As an example, one such action item states:

*Develop and codify in writing, a set of 'Client Service Standards' that are accepted and consistently used by all attorneys in every practice area.*

There is some discussion and concern amongst the members of your SPC as to how this is going to be effectively implemented. The concern emanates from a sense within the group that it has traditionally been very difficult to get lawyers to perform consistently, even so far as getting in their time-sheets on a regular basis is concerned. What to do?

As everyone knows it is common practice to conduct a "postmortem" or lessons learned session upon completion of any major undertaking. If your endeavor achieved its goal, the questions typically focus on what went right, what we did well, and how we might sustain our success. If your initiative fell short or failed to meet expectations, your postmortem efforts tend to focus on what went wrong and how we got off track.

That said, this may be a time to think about con-

ducting a 'premortem.' A Premortem is a process to aid in identifying the potential roadblocks, **before** they have a chance of derailing your implementation efforts.

In a spirit of full disclosure, I confess to borrowing the term "premortem" from a McKinsey article entitled "Strategic

of your group to be self-critical, before they prepare to move forward in implementation, and gets people to voluntarily engage in devil's advocate thinking before the specific action item even gets started.

The team members can then be given a few minutes to individually write down all the rea-

Committee to suggest at least one action that they believe could help to reduce the likelihood of the plan being rejected – including possible revisions to the plan. You may likely hear, as I did when conducting this exercise recently, a number of creative ideas like:

*We could enlist a group of our more senior partners who are well-respected throughout the firm for their gifted client service abilities, as our 'blue-ribbon panel,' to help construct the client service standards based on the kinds of actions that they take on a regular basis.*

*We could gather together a group of key clients to provide input into what our client service standards might include.*

*We could publish the service standards on our web site and in engagement letters such that every client was made aware of the standards and knew what to expect from the lawyer serving them. This would serve as a catalyst for ensuring consistent behavior from amongst our lawyers.*

Conducting a premortem can help you identify potential problems that otherwise would not have surfaced until they caused major damage to the strategic implementation efforts. This process is intended to heighten your Committee's sensitivity to potential areas of contention and then prepare to either counteract or address those areas in a proactive manner. The goal is to prevent potential problems from occurring in order to increase the likelihood of success. For the amount of time invested, a strategic planning premortem is a low-cost, high-payoff activity.

**“A Premortem is a process to aid in identifying the potential roadblocks, before they have a chance of derailing your implementation efforts.”**

Decisions: When Can You Trust Your Gut?" Not only is the article a fascinating read, it supports my belief that a good way to help ensure effective execution of your strategic planning specifics is to ask postmortem-type questions before, rather than after, the fact.

Here is how a strategic planning premortem could be performed.

■ Ask the members of your Strategic Planning Committee to assume that their draft strategic plan or some critical but contentious component of the plan (like the action item identified above) has either failed in it's efforts to be executed or has been totally rejected by the partnership.

Your instructions to the group might be: "Everyone take two minutes and write down all the reasons why you think the undertaking failed." This exercise asks the members

sons they can think of regarding why the plan has failed. Your role as a facilitator would be to have each member announce what is on his / her list.

In some instances, your fellow Committee members may lack the foresight to spot shortcomings. They may be so confident that they don't see the need for a critique. In those situations you may benefit from bringing in some objective, trusted partners to help identify any areas of the plan that may spark contentious debates.

■ Now have the SPC members then determine different ways and actions they could proactively take to prevent the implementation of the specific action item from failing or being rejected.

Ask every member of the Strategic Planning

# McKenna On Leading change



## In Your Law Firm



HOW DO YOU CONVERT A PROCESS-DRIVEN CHANGE INITIATIVE INTO AN EXPERIENCE THAT ENGAGES AND ENTHUSES THE PEOPLE IMPACTED BY THE CHANGE?



Leading law firm strategy and practice management specialist Patrick McKenna says this is one of the more challenging change management issues, backed up by the many research findings over the years about the high failure rate of change programs.

He says those findings reflect the prevalence of the “command and control corporate entity”, where the CEO says “jump!” and everyone says “how high?” and there’s a general assumption from the top that directions will simply be put in place.

“I’ve worked in a public company and can remember the day the CEO walked in and said ‘if you know what happens to a memo when it leaves my office, you’re a better man than I,’” McKenna says.

He believes it’s critical to accurately diagnose the situation an organization is facing, before implementing any change. When working with law firms looking to train new managing partners, he asks them to

identify which of five categories best describes their organization:

- **SUCCESSFUL** — the firm is performing well, and is perceived to be dominant player in its markets;
- **COMPLACENT** — the firm is doing OK financially, the partners’ thinking is trapped by the prevailing success enjoyed in years gone by, but the times are changing;
- **STAGNATING** — the firm is noticeably losing ground to the competition, it is going along aimlessly, and partners have deeply ingrained behaviour;
- **DISTRESSED** — multiple partners are leaving every day, the firm is in a death spiral, there is some degree of stress because of the crisis; and
- **UNSETTLED** — the firm is change fatigued, it has been through so many mergers or other chaotic changes that there is a general internal frustration, and things are perceived to be in a mess.

The need for change can be very different, depending on where the organization fits among these descriptions.

"It might be identifying where the 'power partners' are, that ten per cent of partners who can magically go into a phone booth by themselves and emerge with a client," McKenna explains. "If a firm is under stress, you need to focus change efforts on the people who wield some kind of power. In the case of an unsettled firm, the change might actually be getting rid of change. It's all about determining your partners' appetite for change."

McKenna says many change efforts fail simply because the organization tries to initiate something, then moves straight on to the next topic. "Nothing fails like wondering if this was really something important or just the flavour of the week," he says. "It isn't enough to focus some time on it. The organization needs to say, 'if it's our mandate, we are going to make damn sure we work long and hard on this.'"

### Ripe and unripe

Another key is identifying "ripe" and "unripe" issues in the organization. McKenna says a firm's leader can strategically plan all they want, but they can only ever move to the outer edges of their partners' appetite for change. For example, how prepared are they to move to new fee arrangements, or to introduce more transparency?

"Diagnosis is the first step to change," he says. "I need to find out where my partners are on particular issues. Some will be ripe for change, while other issues may be very critical and are unripe. My leadership challenge is to find ways to ripen those issues over a period of time, for example through bringing in outside speakers, analysing the market place, and generally finding some subtle ways to get them to slowly understand without throwing it in their face or

**"T**ypically, management says "we need to make a change quickly", and nothing happens. We then turn up the volume, because we think 'my partners either didn't hear me or didn't understand what I was conveying or I didn't present it well enough.' Unfortunately; just talking at them does not change behaviour."

getting them to harden their position."

While the statistics on failure of change programs can be daunting, McKenna says there is hope but it has to do with how change is approached. He runs an exercise with legal partners to help them understand just how difficult change can be. Building on the often-cited saying, "you've got to change or die", he asks his audience to imagine if that scenario were real; that change was actually a life and death matter: "Imagine for a moment you get these incredible pains in your chest and we rush you out to a cardiologist who has a look and says 'oh you certainly have had a wonderful lifestyle, you've been eating rich foods and not exercising, we need to do coronary bypass, or – based on your history – you will die. The good news is that in the US, 1.5 million people go through bypass or angioplasty surgery every year. It's not like it's quite as bad as it used to be'

"So we get you into the surgery and you see your physician afterwards. He says, 'the good news is we've managed to look after the situation, but it's not fixed. So, to prevent pain and avoid a repeat and prolong your life you've got to adopt a healthier lifestyle.'" McKenna then asks how many, knowing what they had to do, could give up the smoking, drinking, overeating and stress, and start exercising.

"Sorry, the statistics says you are all dead. According to Johns Hopkins figures, less than 3% of that 1.5 million annually actually survive for a period of five years because they cannot maintain the change."

McKenna says through the example he tries to get lawyers to realise that the difficulty of change

should not be underestimated. He asks them to think back to some important initiative, such as developing effective client teams, which did not turn out to be the roaring success that had been hoped. What were the primary obstacles faced? The overwhelming response, more than 90 per cent, involves changes that some lawyers were not personally motivated to make.

He asks them to think further, about the specific actions the firm took to try to progress the initiative. What was done to bring about the change? More than three quarters say that the change program involved multiple emails, memos, presentations and talking points about the need to change.

"We work with very intelligent people," he says. "Typically, the management says 'you know what we need to do folks, we need to make a change quickly', and nothing happens. We then turn up the volume, because we think 'my partners either didn't hear me or didn't understand what I was conveying or I didn't present it well enough.' Unfortunately, just talking at them does not change behaviour. We've got to find different mechanisms."

McKenna says the habitual approach is to inundate people with facts, fear or force:

■ **Facts** – we think that "clearly you just don't

understand." We think people are essentially rational so just need to give them information to make them change;

■ *Fear* – "if we don't get onto this, we're going to have some bad news, lose business." McKenna says much is written about the need to create some sense of urgency to bring about change. "I'm not saying you don't, but what I've learned in the law environment about our natural human tendency is that if you turn it up too much, the cousin of urgency is fear, paralysis."

■ *Force* – creating a "burning platform", imposing a new system and expecting everyone to fall in line when in reality it's undermined at every level. "You'd be hard pressed to find a lawyer in North America or the UK who hasn't been through the cycle of Total Quality Management or some other magical change initiative that everyone was going to embrace," McKenna says. "There's a natural scepticism among partners – 'here comes another management change initiative'. I've witnessed how a junior professional can go to a senior and ask 'what this all about?' and the senior will say 'head down, billables up, this too will pass'. Management in firms have to understand the scepticism around anything they themselves initiative. Simply by spearheading the change, being the champion, don't expect everyone to get on board and salute it."

### Managing resistance

McKenna says in his observations, the best leaders in a change process find ways to get the change out there subtly, listen to what the partners' perspectives are and promote as much discussion as possible.

He urges organisational leaders to look on resistance to change as a gift rather than a problem. "You want to invite resistance, bring it to the surface, make it safe to express resistance," he says. "You may not have thought this proposal through properly. The resistance may offer some suggestions about how to make change work even more effectively."

McKenna encourages people to frame the resistance as, "how do we make this work?" rather than "give me the reasons why I shouldn't even try." He cites one CEO whose three key questions for change were: "How do I make this work? What's the worst that could happen?" and "where the hell is my back door if the worst that could happen, happens?"

He says the first question is positive: "I invite resistance to the point of 'please help me think this through to make it work'. If you close off resistance, you're saying 'we've already made our decision, we're not interested in hearing from you'. Often management is guilty of making a decision then feigning buy-in. That just does not work."

Working with resistance is about being open to a different way, and getting a good sense of who may have some issues that need to be addressed. Some of that may involve one-on-one communication. "Keep in mind that every change usually represents a loss of some kind," McKenna says. "At the most personal level, change equals loss. Who feels threatened that they might be losing something? What is that, and is that threat genuine, or is it just a misperception on their part?"

The loss – real or perceived – might involve esteem, money, status, relationships or other factors. The change manager must get some sense of that loss. If it is real, it should be put on the table.

"Acknowledge there's going to be a loss, keep nothing hidden," he says. "You only get them on board to the extent that they see that going in the new direction is better than the status quo. You can try to persuade them until the cows come home, or subtly find ways to get them to come to that recognition of their own volition. Part of the change effort is a numbers game. You're never going to get everyone on board.

Abandon that thought right now. To the extent that you get enough of the significant partners on board, the rest will follow. Or, as one said, at some point you've said 'no' to enough of your partners that you realise that your tenure and office is slowly coming to an end."

### The pilot project

McKenna says launching a pilot project can be an effective leverage tool. Rather than trying to launch a full-blown change effort, start with something small and admit you don't know if it is going to work or not.

He has seen this work in a number of firms trying to introduce business development training. "They say, 'we would like you to come and help us assess if this is going to work. We will run a couple of pilot projects, sample sessions, and we need you to sit in wearing two caps; a participant and someone who will critique this for us'.

"When you give people that kind of power and respect, they take it seriously. You can then say, 'the session didn't work, but you like the idea. How can we do it differently so it will work?' Now you're not talking about whether we'll do the training, you've gravitated to how we'll do the training. That's a huge step."

He says there are numerous levers the leadership can use. Levers that do not work include the dictatorial approach or trying to convince people with facts.

### Attitude versus behaviour

McKenna says that in the debate over which element comes first; attitude or behaviour, he is a firm believer that behaviour changes attitude. "You can't change attitude, but if people are exposed to the right thing, that will slowly have their attitude get congruent with their behaviour," he says. Initiatives can include doing an internal survey, benchmarking, sending people

out to educational events, or developing awards.

McKenna cites an example from what happened at one US law firm. "When you walk into their reception area they have this huge lion, known as the Shaw Lion. At one point there was a need within the firm to get people to be more collaborative. Collaborative,

by their definition, was that if someone needed help with something, the help given was genuine and not just because they got to bill their time to some client. That was a change. They did it by creating miniature Shaw's Lions, about the size of your fist, made out of pewter."

"Once a year all the equity partners would vote on the lawyer in the firm who made the greatest contribution to helping them personally and their practice, and they awarded that lawyer the Shaw's Lion. I can tell you - from having one of those people in a room and discussing the highlight of their professional practice - I witnessed a lawyer in his early fifties relate to his colleagues about receiving this award with tears in his eyes. Talk about emotion driving change and the idea of what you reward! Unfortunately, too many people take that to mean 'if we throw money at the issue people's behaviours will change.' If you celebrate people's contributions in a public way, that changes behaviour."

### Change in a highly professional work environment

McKenna acknowledges that in the professional work environment of a legal firm, "ego discomfort"<sup>10</sup> is a reality. The discomfort created by performing poorly when doing something new, becomes amplified as people get older or

**"The discomfort created by performing poorly when doing something new, becomes amplified as people get older or stuck in their way of doing things. Asking any professional to go from being competent to incompetent is a very unappealing suggestion."**

stuck in their way of doing things. "Asking any professional to go from being competent to incompetent is a very unappealing suggestion," he points out.

A risk in a professional environment is that people may quickly take up a position opposing the change because the idea has not been nurtured or ripened. "The problem with intelligent people is that if they put out publicly that they think something is a dumb idea, no matter how intelligent you make it, it's tough for them to back down," McKenna says.

In his experience, nearly every successful change in such an environment has come about because it has been a more subtle process, with an issue introduced and stakeholders given time to think about it.

He relates the story of one managing partner who very early into his tenure organised a partner's lunch at least once a month. Some participants took part through audio or video conferencing. He invited a speaker, for example the managing partner of an accounting firm, an academic doing some relevant research, or an important client. Speakers were deliberately chosen for their provocative content. "It was clear, if you followed where he was going, that he was trying to educate his partners about the world and what was going on out there," McKenna says. The managing partner likened

his colleagues to racehorses with blinders on, focused on the next client file that hit their desk. "Every so often I nudge them or give them a swift kick to look out the window and see what's going on in the world," he said. Within a short time, word was getting around the firm about these lunches, and there was much discussion about the latest speaker and the issues that speaker raised.

"That was his way of ripening particular issues, so pretty soon his partners were coming to him and enunciating those issues," McKenna explains. "But for him to have led that charge, he would have been doomed. So, I think the change initiative has to be subtle, almost like political grass roots movements, nurturing and educating people and using the tools that are available."

McKenna says while some firm leaders have natural interpersonal skills that will help during change, others can at least be sensitised. He outlines to them the various approaches to bring about change, and asks which they think would work most effectively on them.

"We always take a different approach when we start to think about 'what would work on me; somebody harping at me, or somebody who leads me to start thinking about an issue in a way that's in my own best interests?' That can then be used to influence the way they lead change in the organization," he says.

1. McKenna, P., *Leading Change: Adaptive Approaches To Implementing Your Best Intentions*, 2010, [www.patrickmckenna.com](http://www.patrickmckenna.com)

From an interview conducted by Nerly East, MA, PhD, author writer and communication specialist.

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# Who Likes You?



## And Who Doesn't?

In 'The Wisdom of Confucious' (translated by Lin Yutan London, 1958) there appears the following exchange –

Zigong asked Confucious 'What would you say if all the people of a village like a person?' 'That is not enough' replied Confucious.

'What would you say if all the people of the village dislike a person?' 'That is not enough,' replied Confucious.

'It is better when the good people of the village like him, and the bad people dislike him.'

*Confucious died in 479 B.C., but his lesson still applies to strategy, marketing, managing and careers.*

The essence of strategy is to achieve a positioning in the market where you can be truly the best on some key dimensions that clients care about. McDonald's is the best if what you want is clean, cheerful fast-food service. Some high-cuisine restaurant is the best in serving customers with other preferences.

As firms keep discovering, it is certain market decay if you try to please **both** of these distinct clients. To have some people **really** like what you have, it is necessary that some other people do not like what you offer.

Picking a strategy takes courage, which is why so few firms stick to their own. They can't stand anyone not liking them. It's like a customer walks into their McDonald's store and asks for a

curry, and, since it's cash, we can't resist trying to adapt the restaurant to accommodate the new request. And that, of course, will quickly make you cease being a finely tuned operation to deliver what you originally chose. You'll stop being the best at anything.

The same is true in marketing. Marketing is not about the number of people you can reach, nor the number of proposals you get to make. The essence of marketing is that you know exactly what your positioning is, and you don't waste time marketing to people who don't want that. Just because millions of people despise Coca Cola and would never think of drinking it (the snobs!), it doesn't mean Coke does bad marketing – quite the opposite. Coke knows its constituency and plays to it.

All this is also true of managing. It is not the job of a manager to be liked, nor to create a culture that can accommodate the broadest possible range of work and employee preferences. As my research has shown, managers serve best when they create a clear (internal and external) ideology that says – this is what we believe in around here. If you can believe it too, come on in and welcome. If you can't subscribe to our beliefs and way of doing things, please go elsewhere.

Done this way, companies achieve what Jim Collins in *Good to Great* called 'getting the right people on and off the bus' – right up front – and have fewer subsequent management problems. Since everyone has signed up for the same thing, the organization can focus on getting to work fulfilling its purpose. The bad people did not like it there and either did not join or they leave

– what a brilliant conclusion!

Finally, Confucious' lesson applies to each of us in our career and life. I remember being in college worrying that I didn't know enough about ballet, football, philosophy, what was on TV, modern art, jazz, my appearance. The list was endless on things SOME people would judge me on, and I couldn't possibly shine in all those things.

There was only one solution, and it wasn't trying to please or be loved by everyone. The right answer turned out to be figuring out what I truly believed in, passionately throwing myself into that, and then seeking out the company of those who liked that, and avoiding the company of those who did not.

So, the acid test is – do the good people like you and the bad people don't? If so, all's well!

Good strategic, marketing, managerial and career advice. Thanks, Confucious!



**DAVID H. MAISTER**

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# HANDLING PARTNERS WITH STRONG VIEWS

NOTES : F R O M T H E L A B

## RESPONSE:

Members of our LAB confided that during their respective tenures there were always a small handful of folks who resisted *everything* that seemed new or progressive . . . the Fortune list of Best Places to Work was for sissies; having offices outside of your core market was silly when your core market was such a strong market; a proposed firm childcare facility was inconsistent with the workplace as they envisioned it; 360 degree reviews let the inmates take control of the asylum; and finally, new technology was a waste of money and a drain on partner profits.

The LAB has some advice, both general and related to the 'value' issue you raised. First, keep in mind that an idea isn't 'new' just because you happen to think of it. That means that some of your partners will feel they know about the idea, have thought it through and have either accepted or rejected it in their practice.

"Enhanced client value" may be one of these. It is quite a popular (and fashionable) discussion topic these days and while some partners do react to it by resisting change, some others - - some rightly - - may feel that they have been delivering value quite effectively for a long time.

That said, dealing with dismissive and resistant people can be extremely frustrating. Trying to change them can be even worse.

Understanding why one of your partners finds it so difficult to change can provide some insight and relief. Although changing another person is out of your control, there are some

## QUESTION

Since recently becoming our firm's managing director, I've been engaging a number of my colleagues in discussions on how we should be concerned with delivering more value to our clients. I think this is an important issue for us going forward and find that most of my partners are on-board conceptually and willing to explore the issue. However, there are a few who have responded uncompromisingly, with rather curt, dismissive statements whenever the topic comes up. Any tips for me on how you might handle the partner who holds strong beliefs on high-stake topics and demonstrates little willingness to either listen or consider alternative views?

things you can do that can help. Here are a few suggestions based on our collective experience:

1. You might want to explore getting the message to come through directly from your clients or competitors.

In the case of value, it should be easy to find support for your views on both of these fronts. After all, it's one thing for the leader to say, "my beloved partners, I think we should begin to explore this particular initiative in order to better serve our clients." But have you ever noticed how some message is taken far more seriously and gains far more traction when it comes from the mouth of one of your important signature clients?

Some managing partners have done an admirable job of simply bringing clients to the table on a regular basis to talk to their partners about what's going on in their industry, what new issues are emerging and what they think outside law firms should be doing to partner with them. Those same managing partners can then be found roaming the halls over the next following days, talking to each partner about what he or she thinks about what they heard that particular GC say.

The same can be said with respect to how many partners react when they read about something one of their competitors (whom they have some respect for) is doing. Find a way to casually dis-



tribute to your partners, news and rumors about what you find competitors taking action on. Done well, you will soon have a line at your door of partners wanting you to take some kind of action on the very same issue.

## 2. Let your difficult partner be heard - but in more depth than quips - so you and the other partners can assess the merits of his or her views.

People usually have a reason – be it rational or emotional (likely a combination of the two) for why they don't want to support a particular issue. A mistake you can make as a leader is to assume you know why. Even if some obstinate partner has shared his or her reasons in the past, it is important to ask them about their concerns and reservations this time. Do this in as authentic and non-threatening way as you can. Your goal is to truly understand what they are thinking and feeling about the particular subject. Recognize that you're dealing with the psychological complexities of a person here, not just a "rational, logical" situation.

Be sure your interest is sincere. If you just want a chance to demonstrate the perfection of your own opinions, you may be assured that you will elicit the same from your partner. But if you want dialogue, be sure you are open to new information and perspectives. Your goal should not be to convince them or influence them at this point. Your goal is only to listen. Recognize that doing this may, in itself, be tremendously valuable. The chance to describe thoughts and feelings often helps the resisters understand their feelings better themselves. Be willing to ask exactly how big of a deal this issue, and their resistance to it, is. Assuming you are familiar with 'active listening' techniques this is a good time to use them.

## 3. Acknowledge that you heard your partner and understand his or her views - you can then respectfully agree, disagree or just move ahead without them.

Everyone appreciates being heard in a nonjudgmental way and your partners need to be acknowledged for their opinions. Depending on the issue and your partner's particular response you have a number of alternative courses of action:

**“Y***our goal should not be to convince them or influence them at this point. Your goal is only to listen. Recognize that doing this may, in itself, be tremendously valuable.”*

- You can encourage disagreement. A startling truth about dialogue is that people are okay with you expressing even very strongly held views so long as you are equally genuine in your invitation of their disagreement. Before sharing your opinions with your partner, make a statement like, *"You know, I've got a really strong opinion on this. I've thought a great deal about it and read pretty widely, and I'd like to tell you my view. But at the end, if you see holes in it, or if you have new information I don't have, I desperately hope you'll challenge me with it. I really want to learn from your view in any way I can."* This sincere invitation takes the fighting wind out of most obstinate partners' sails. They realize they don't have to beat you over the head with their opinions because you're *asking* for them!

- What can happen is that when you offer a suggestion and your partner opposes it, you feel compelled to dig in and rationalize why your suggestion was the right course of action.

It can be more productive to steer any debate in a productive direction in an effort to find common ground. In those cases the more effective move may be to simply acknowledge the partner's point of view. When you do this, your partner's opposition has nowhere to go. Without losing any important ground you can simply say, *"I see your point,"* and leave it at that. You can then come back later and approach the topic from a different angle.

- Never miss a chance to agree. When we agree on 50 percent of a topic and disagree on 50 percent we tend to move quickly to the disagreements because those are what interest us the most. However, if you want worthwhile dialogue with your partner, take the time to listen for points on which you agree. Point them out. Confirm them. Then—and only then—move to the areas of disagreement. When

you do this you reaffirm that your goal is not to win, it's to learn.

- Sometimes you can move past their concerns by "agreeing to disagree." And sometimes, once they have been heard, they are ready to move on with the change, even if it isn't what they would have done had they had the choice.

## 4. After your partner has been heard, do not let that individual be disruptive in meetings - if he is, stop him politely and stop the disruptive behavior.

Perhaps your partner's reluctance isn't a show-stopper. Perhaps this individual enjoys whining about the change but is actually prepared to move forward with implementing the new procedure. Or perhaps they are a major road-block. Whatever the situation, recognize that while we need to be patient with people (not everyone will come on board with any change at the same time); at some point their resist-

ance or reluctance may become a performance issue. When the situation is a performance issue, you need to call upon your one-on-one coaching skills as appropriate and necessary.

**5. Trying to turn a person like this around up front may be counter productive - some relish the maverick role and use it to get attention and so will persist. Do not give them public attention.**

An obstinate partner constitutes an important challenge. Dig deep into your determination and rally your positive thoughts. Don't let this individual bring your spirit down, which is most certainly what they are trying to do. It's a resistance tactic, so don't give them such an easy victory. Look for ways to quarantine them to avoid collateral damage. Furthermore, your other partners are watching closely for your reaction. Lead with courage, conviction and stamina.

**6. Surround the individual - that is work with those who support the issue and see if he or she falls into line.**

People do things to benefit themselves, not to benefit you. Why is it in his or her interest to embrace any specific issue? Sometimes the answer lies simply in them seeing that other of their colleagues and people whom they admire are signing on to support the issue.

Also consider involving some of the naysayers, in some way, in your change leadership efforts. Turning an influential cynic into an advocate represents a great coup for any change effort. When people see it happening, their own doubts about the particular project quickly evaporate.

**7. Use an influencer - someone he or she respects - done in private.**

**“If the resister still needs help being influenced to change, you may not be the right or best person. Maybe you don't have the right communications style. Maybe they don't want to hear from anyone in the firm's leadership ranks.”**

If the resister still needs help being influenced to change, you may not be the right or best person. Maybe you don't have the right communications style. Maybe they don't want to hear from anyone in the firm's leadership ranks. Maybe the stars are out of alignment. Whatever the reason, encourage them to talk to their peers or others who are on board who might be able to relate the benefits of the initiative more successfully than you.

**8. Give him or her "private" space to change their mind and their behavior.**

New situations and places can be scary, and rather than admit their fear, people will often appear to be stubborn. Plus, we're comfortable with what's familiar to us. So it's easier to resist something that's new and unfamiliar. If your initiative can be broken down into bite size chunks, that feel doable and relatively easy, there is a greater likelihood that you'll get a degree of co-operation.

Alternatively, if the primary issue is a lack of confidence in the probability of success, talk won't change their attitude. Actions and results will. If you can quickly deliver some short-term successes as proof of the validity of your concept and as evidence of your determination, you may quietly convert those who were initially resistant to your efforts.

**9. Based on your example, where you have many of the partners with you, take a deep breath and move ahead.**

The reality in many situations is that not everyone will like or want to work under the changed scenario. You will gradually recognize that some of your partners will never be won over. If you have a large enough group, there will always be someone whose mind won't change. Trying to convince every single one of them would sap your energy

from other issues that were more important. So when you feel you have built a reasonable consensus around an issue, move on to the next issue.

We hope these modest ideas are useful to you as you engage with others. We truly believe the future lies in our capacity to develop a common purpose and mutual respect.

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*This article is excerpted from our new book, **Serving At The Pleasure of My Partners: Advice For The NEW Firm Leader***

The LAB is comprised of the following distinguished current and former law firm leaders: An-gelo Arcadipane (Dickstein Shapiro LLP); John Bouma (Snell & Wilmer LLP); Brian K. Burke (Baker & Daniels LLP); Ben F. Johnson, III (Alston & Bird LLP); Keith B. Simmons (Bass Berry & Sims PLC); William J. Strickland (McGuire Woods LLP); Harry P. Trueheart, III (Nixon Peabody LLP); R. Thomas Stanton (Squire Sanders); Robert M. Granatstein (Blake Cassels and Graydon) together with Patrick J. McKenna

# The Challenge of SHARING LEADERSHIP

Here is a provocative scenario: You are in your early fifties, a successful practitioner and in the midst of your best revenue-generating years, when your partners ask you to take on being the firm's next managing partner. Your initial term is four-years, with an option to renew for additional terms; but you are going to have to give up a substantial portion of your practice to manage and lead your firm. What do you do?

In November 2010, I surveyed and heard from 92 law firms on this and other issues related to firm leadership. My research was a repeat of a survey I conducted six years earlier. The most striking difference between the two was the time dedicated to full-time management of the firm. In 2004, 24 percent reported managing their firms on a full-time basis. By late 2010, only 9 percent claimed that their management/leadership roles were full-time. All indications are that this decrease in full-time effort is one consequence of our protracted recessionary conditions. Today, even firm leaders are increasingly sensitive to their partners seeing them make a billable contribution.

My research also shows that firm leaders who relinquish their practices to assume management responsibility may be in a tough spot when their leadership role comes to its conclusion. Only 23 percent of firms have some form of 'parachute provision' or other compensation formulas to help lawyers ease-out of their management roles and back into full-time practice. Thus, following your retirement from a management role, you may find yourself having to work under a new compensation arrangement, contingent on your performance as a practitioner. And if there were any unhappy events (like your firm dissolved) that occurred during your leadership tenure, your career may be in real difficulty. Meanwhile, having passed your client load off to other partners in the firm, you now lack the traditional hefty book of business that makes you attractive to your, or any other firm.

What this seems to be stimulating is a growing trend towards a model of shared leadership – either by having co-managing partners, an Associate Managing Partner role, or a Chief Operating



Officer who all continue to practice law, even while having firm leadership responsibilities. This allows each individual to keep his or her hand in the practice and maintain client relationships against that day when they may return to practice full time. Perhaps of equal importance in some firms, it provides a measure of credibility that may be needed in dealing with partners.

Now we face a different challenge!

The job of managing a law firm may certainly be demanding enough for two professionals; but the test is getting two people to share the role. Attempts to split the managing partner job can lead to clashing egos and crippling power struggles, especially if one of the two partners conceals an ambition for holding the position alone.

The most successful pairs often consist of firm co-founders or partners who started at the firm at the same time when it was smaller. And it is easier in those firms that truly have a 'team-oriented' culture. Despite some problems with sharing responsibilities numerous law firms have made it work. Here are the key components to focus on:

#### ■ **Cultivate Self-Awareness. (What are we each good at?)**

One of the initial hurdles to sharing leadership responsibilities is that you do not usually get to choose your partner and this can obviously cause some frustration.

There are a few exceptions. Martin Fantozzi, co-managing partner of Goulston Storrs tells me, "our managing partners serve 3 year terms and are subject to review by a nominating committee at the end of each term. When we have decided to make a change, the nominating committee has spent a great deal of time looking for individuals with complementary skill sets who will function well as a team. We have never changed both managing directors at the same time so a significant part of the nominating committee's charge has been to identify the strengths of the individual who is likely to continue in the role and to attempt to select another individual with a complementary skill set. In that process, we think a great deal about practice area diversity, age diversity, external vs. internal focus, etc."

In the ideal situation, co-managing partners would have complementary capabilities and different sets of experiences. Perhaps one of you is from the transactional side of the firm while the other a litigator. Or one is perceived as the more senior statesman while the other is recognized for their youthful entrepreneurial spirit. In other words, the best situation is where the two partners bring different skill sets and different talents to the table such that either of you would freely admit that you could not do the things that the other does. This allows different leadership styles and different competencies to be available to the benefit of your firm.

***"It is advisable, early in your working relationship, to engage in some form of self-assessment to obtain a measure of your leadership strengths, personal work style and emotional disposition in order to have some hard data to examine and compare."***

In beginning to understand each other, each of you has to be brutally honest— in understanding your respective strengths and weaknesses. It is advisable, early in your working relationship, to engage in some form of self-assessment to obtain a measure of your leadership strengths, personal work style and emotional disposition in order to have some hard data to examine and compare. It is valuable when two

professionals who are set to co-lead and work closely together can examine their respective backgrounds, personalities, management styles and begin to appreciate where they are similar and where they are quite different.

One self-assessment tool that I have invested 15-minutes into doing on myself, is available at no charge and can be accessed at: <http://personal.psu.edu/j5j/IPIP/ipipneo120.htm>

This assessment measures five domains of personality: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and intellect. It provides you with an instantaneous written report of about 9 to 10 pages presenting a detailed description of your personality according to the six sub-facets that comprise each of the five main domains.

You might also consider asking for formal (or informal) 360-degree feedback to get an accurate sense of how others in your firm are viewing each of your respective attributes and shortcomings.

### ■ **Ensure There Is A Shared Commitment to the Firm. (Can we agree to put the firm first?)**

In order for two professionals (you and your partner) to successfully lead one firm, you need to develop or come together on a shared ambition for where you would like to see the firm go and what you would like to see the firm achieve during your joint tenure.

Having examined a number of shared leadership arrangements, one factor is paramount – those partners involved have to be prepared to work together as a team for the good of the entire firm. This factor, more than any other, allows you to work through any differences and collaborate effectively. Each of you must be prepared to learn how to take a step back in the areas where the other is better equipped to take the lead. There can be no competition between you for power or accolades. A very specific problem arises when motives are suspect. If either of you is perceived to be pursuing a personal agenda – that is a clear red flag.

### ■ **Develop A Working Relationship (How do we manage our respective egos?)**

Being a co-managing partner is demanding in that it runs counter to the natural tendency of lawyers to strive for individual achievement. A lawyer's identity and self-worth is focused around what he or she accomplished as a practitioner and upon developing competencies that serve to distinguish them in meaningful ways.

There may be fewer opportunities for individual achievements when you share leadership. Indeed you must agree to share the responsibility – both the glory and the agony – as a team, not as individuals. Many achievements will be joint achievements. When some outcome is achieved primarily by one of the two co-leaders, your partners may assume that you worked together or feel that it is appropriate to recognize both leaders equally. The greatest challenge for you both to overcome will be to subordinate your respective egos. Are you comfortable with walking on stage and taking your bows together, even though you may feel that you did the lion's share of the work on the project that your partners thought deserved such kudos? Co-leadership can only work if each partner is prepared to share credit and . . . share blame, equally.

The co-managing partner of one accounting firm I know reported that their views of “working together seamlessly” are so strong that following his giving a professional journal an interview, he refused to have his picture taken for the article about his firm unless his counterpart was also included in the photo.

You need to sincerely want to see your co-leader be successful. Where that exists, conflict and criticism are easier to deal with professionally. It starts with having two managing partners who have the right attitude, in that they are *always* prepared to give the other the benefit of the doubt and trust that the other person is doing what is right for the benefit of the firm. You must also have a willingness to accept that someone else may disagree with your approach and actually have a better way of handling some situation.

Find out how your co-leader deals with conflict and stress and share how you tend to deal with difficult and stressful situations. Agree on how you will best work with one another if one or both of you find yourselves tired, stressed or finding that things are not going so smoothly.

Finally, there is a need to be honest about those areas where one is weak and agree to help fill any gaps by teaching each other. You will have strengths and competencies that your partner lacks, but you should compensate without undermining your colleagues' weaknesses.

### ■ **Clearly Define Roles (Who is the better choice to provide leadership in specific areas?)**

Agreeing to work together as co-managing partners always involves some upfront discussion about roles – and those roles must be carefully designed. One of the more common distinctions when dividing the workload is to have one individual dedicated to the external environment (strategic direction, client service and new business development) while the other takes responsibility for the internal environment (budgets, personnel and operations).

That said, you can divide the leadership duties in any number of ways. One might be responsible for the international offices, while the other focuses on the Americas. One might be in charge of technology and finance; while the other oversees marketing and partnership issues. One can have a task-orientation while the other is better with handling the intricacies of working with the people – partners and staff. Responsibilities can be divided by interests

(strategy vs. operations), skills (innovation vs. implementation), or personality bent (being task-oriented vs. people oriented).

If a natural division of labor is not apparent, you may wish to start by conducting an inventory of the tasks, activities and responsibilities of the managing partner's role. (I did this a few years back and came up with a list of over 50 bullet-point activity items). Now choose which of these activities would best be performed by which partner, and which activities should be done together. At the conclusion of this exercise, you need to be absolutely clear amongst the two of you as to what activity should be performed by who (that individual who has the better knowledge, experience, or contacts) and you need to be absolutely transparent with your other partners on who has responsibility for what. Having distinct responsibilities helps mitigate one of the potential pitfalls of the co-managing partner arrangement: confusion among partners and staff as to who is responsible for what aspect of the firm's business and thereby helps to resolve communications and reporting problems.

You also need to be very clear concerning the degree of freedom each of you has around taking individual action. For example, will it become an eventual cause for conflict if one of you is constantly the source of media commentary and has their name in the papers representing the views of the firm? Or, while it may be unrealistic for both co-leaders to be present in all meetings and interactions with other partners, on which subjects do you have complete discretion to represent the other?

Finally, there needs to be a purposeful effort to ensure that no administrative professional (CFO, CMO, HR, etc.) ever reports to both co-leaders. It is conceivable to have the marketing and IT professionals reporting to Mr. External and the financial and personnel professionals reporting to Ms. Internal. It is important to avoid any potential for confusion. Fellow partners should not be seen "shopping" their pet projects around, and subordinates should not be allowed to play you off against one another by asking you for something after your co-leader has already said no.

### ■ Establish Working Protocols (How are we going to coordinate so we don't step on each other's toes?)

In discussing with co-managing partners, the nature of their relationships, the first thoughts offered on what makes for an effective relationship are terms like "good chemistry, trust, mutual respect, and confidence." These broad descriptions convey a general feel of the relationship, but what are the specifics that make these relationships work? What are the elements that make up this "good chemistry"—and can they be replicated? When you probe deeper, there are two essential ingredients that must be in place:

**“**You need to be very clear concerning the degree of freedom each of you has around taking individual action. Will it become an eventual cause for conflict if one of you is constantly the source of media commentary and has their name in the papers representing the views of the firm?**”**

### DECISION MAKING

There is a fundamental dilemma involved in having two people sharing leadership responsibilities: If you strongly disagree with your co-leader on some course of action, now what do you do?

Co-managing partners report that having some pre-agreed process, protocol or ground rules (you choose the term you favor) in place that allows for open debate and true decision-making is important. The process is required to help co-leader determine how, specifically, they will

deal with any disagreements that may arise between them.

In effect, you and your partner should create a decision-making model wherein you attempt to identify the decisions (or types of decisions) that will need to be made. You can then collaborate on determining which decisions can be made by either of you alone (with one simply informing the other), and which decisions require agreement of both co-leaders.

In some situation, the easiest approach is simply to defer to the individual who would appear to have the most experience with the particular issue at hand. In other instances, I have seen two co-leaders agree that they will be prepared to defer to that individual who expresses the strongest feeling about a particular decision. So, if the situation were such that my colleague felt strongly about something,

I would have agreed to back off and defer to my colleague on that particular topic.

And, in those instances where both of you may have equal expertise or strong feelings about the subject, you need to resolve any disagreement by choosing some trusted advisor(s) to serve as arbitrator and help you both reach a satisfactory decision. Your capacity to reach a compromise in cases of divergent views is the glue that builds your relationship.

Leadership watching is a great spectator sport among many of your fellow partners and even the most inconsequential differences can be perceived as indications of a rift between you. Like good parents that try never to fight in front of their children, it is important to have a rule whereby you will hash out any issues of discord in private.

## COMMUNICATIONS

Most co-managing partners report that they make it a habit to communicate regularly, at least a couple times a week with their counterpart, and far more frequently at the onset of the relationship. Your communications should include formal and informal venues, be open, respectful, and accommodating of your partner's communication preferences – be they by e-mail, phone conversations, texts or in-person.

Many note that they make an intentional effort to stay in touch by setting aside dedicated time to work with their counterpart. Make face time a priority. For one co-leader that meant flying to the opposite coast and working there for a few days of each month. For another, it meant scheduling a regular monthly luncheon with a pre-agreed upon agenda to share thoughts, debate issues, develop common positions and plan their work. The important lesson is to specifically make time to meet and communicate – don't leave it to chance.

Again, Martin Fantozzi reports, "In terms of the functioning of the relationship, it is really akin to the give and take in a good marriage. My co-managing partner, Doug Husid, and I try to connect either in person or by email / phone almost every day and we meet weekly in pre-assigned times. One of the challenges is figuring out how to bring some efficiency to the various tasks at hand by assigning one of us to a primary role. There are other issues that really require us both to be deeply involved. Given our tradition and culture, we really have not worried about the notion of one person aspiring for sole control.

The "staying in touch" process creates the context – it allows each of you to keep your fingers on the pulse of the firm, to be sensitive to opinions and issues that need attention.

Ultimately, each of you as the firm's co-leaders, must be able to speak for his or her partner so that the communication comes across with 'a single voice.'

One important element of your communications protocol is that you should never be 'surprised' by news; particularly bad news. It must be the desire of both to keep the other fully informed of issues and potential issues that relate to your firm's performance and leadership.

## Embracing Shared Leadership

### Co-leadership Can Work Well When:

- You both put the firm first
- You would like to divide the workload
- You have complementary strengths / experiences
- You value the other's perspective
- You are both willing to compromise
- Neither of you demands all the credit
- You want to help each other grow
- You are both good listeners
- You respect and like each other
- You both work equally hard

When one thinks of having co-managing partners, the favored analogy is riding a tandem bicycle. Riding a bike with two seats, two sets of pedals and powered by two individuals, who may at any second decide they would like to go in different directions, can be a challenge. Attempting to steer a firm of traditionally autonomous professionals in tandem requires a delicate balancing act.

The good news is that it can be accomplished with some thoughtful preparation. If your firm has potential office or firm leaders who would be great in the role but are reluctant to give up their client responsibilities, the notion of having co-leaders may be an attractive alternative. The 'power of two' can give your firm the extra managerial bandwidth needed to cope with a complex, fast-changing, competitive environment and foster an internal dynamic where both leaders challenge each other to higher levels of performance.

# LAW FIRM LEADERS

In July I launched the ONLY group on LinkedIn exclusively for, and populated by law firm leaders – firm chairs, managing partners, and a few qualified executive committee members. Thus far we have welcomed over 70 law firm leaders as members with 62% representing leaders from firms of 100 to 300 lawyers; 16% from firms of 300 to 500 lawyers and another 19% coming from firms of over 500 attorneys.

Our membership, while international, hails primarily from U.S. firms of over 100 lawyers in size, and this is a “closed” group, which means that it is “member-only” with none of our discussions being visible or searchable on the Web.

Our initial activity consists of discussions on topics like:

- The TransAtlantic Elite
- Do You Think This Business Model Offers Any Real Competition To Your Firm?
- What Are You Doing To Encourage Innovation?
- How Have You Effectively Used Symbols or Symbolic Behavior to Leverage Your Leadership Priorities?
- Obtaining Advance Consent From Your Partners

Our most popular discussion thus far has evidenced over 20 responses to this question:

## **What is Your Very Best Piece of Advice To Your Successor?**

*My question of each of you: As you think back over your years of service as a managing partner, as you think about some of the leadership les-*

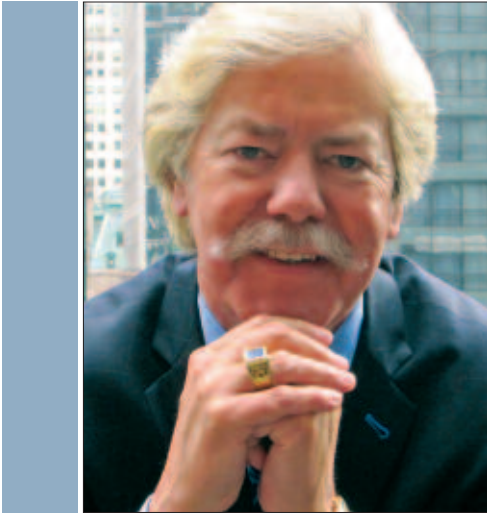
*sons that you've learned (perhaps some through trials of fire), what one important suggestion, idea or piece of advice would you offer that individual (and assume it's your best friend) who becomes your successor.*

I started this group for two reasons: One, to introduce managing partners to social networking sites (like LinkedIn, Legal Onramp, FaceBook and others) where more and more lawyers are learning to connect with each other and with clients.

The second reason is because I continue to co-facilitate a one-day program for brand new managing partners (usually held at the University of Chicago) and participants continue to report to us that they have few outlets where they might ask questions or seek relevant information and advice. And so I thought, why not experiment with a social network site like this to see if we can collaborate and put it to good use. So this is a tool to help you build relationships and learn with and from your peers, who face similar questions, issues or challenges. I will encourage group members to share leadership-relevant materials, pose questions, direct attention to timely and relevant articles or trends, and comment on what others are saying.

Now, if you don't happen to be a member of www.linkedin.com, I guess you will have to join. But the good news is that there is no cost other than a couple of minutes of your time to register. And the shocking news may be how many in your firm are already members and indeed you may even find that your firm is already listed under "Companies." Imagine that.

If you are already a member than this is even easier. Just search under "Groups" for **Law Firm Leaders**, click on the "Join Group" button and I'll look after the rest.



## PATRICK J. MCKENNA

### P R O F E S S I O N A L P R O F I L E

An internationally recognized authority on law practice management, Patrick McKenna serves as co-Chairman of the Managing Partner Leadership Advisory Board, a forum for new firm leaders to pose questions about their burning issues. Since 1983 he has worked with the top management of premier law firms around the globe to discuss, challenge and escalate their thinking on how to manage and compete effectively.

He is author of a pioneering text on law firm marketing, *Practice Development: Creating a Marketing Mindset* (Butterworths, 1989), recognized by an international journal as being "among the top ten books that any professional services marketer should have." His subsequent works include *Herding Cats: A Handbook for Managing Partners and Practice Leaders* (IBMP, 1995); and *Beyond Knowing: 16 Cage-Rattling Questions To Jump-Start Your Practice Team* (IBMP, 2000), both of which were Top 10 Management bestsellers.

One of the profession's foremost experts on firm leadership, his book (co-authored with David Maister), *First Among Equals: How to Manage a Group of Professionals*, (The Free Press, 2002) topped business bestseller lists in the United States, Canada and Australia; has been translated into nine languages; is currently in its sixth printing; and received an award for being one of the best business books of 2002; while in 2006, his e-book *First 100 Days: Transitioning A New Managing Partner* (NXTBook) earned glowing reviews and

has been read by leaders in 63 countries. The book *Management Skills* (John Wiley, 2005) named McKenna among the "leading thinkers in the field" together with Peter Drucker and Warren Bennis; and in 2008, the book *In The Company of Leaders* included his work amongst other notable luminaries like Dr. Marshall Goldsmith and Brian Tracy.

His published articles have appeared in over 50 leading professional journals, newsletters, and online sources; and his work has been featured in *Fast Company*, *Business Week*, *The Globe and Mail*, *The Economist*, *Investor's Business Daily* and *The Financial Times*.

McKenna did his MBA graduate work at the Canadian School of Management, is among the first alumni at Harvard's Leadership in Professional Service Firms program, and holds professional certifications in both accounting and management. He has served at least one of the top ten largest law firms in each of over a dozen different countries and his work with North American law firms has evidenced him serving at least 62 of the largest NLJ 250 firms.

His expertise was acknowledged in 2008 when he was identified through independent research compiled and published by Lawdragon as "one of the most trusted names in legal consulting" and his three decades of experience in consulting has led to his being the subject of a Harvard Law School Case Study entitled: *Innovations In Legal Consulting* (2011).

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