

Showing Your Worth

It's January in Chicago, and that means I spend *much* more time indoors, whether it's working (it's warm in my office) or watching television (it's comfortably toasty in my apartment, too). Often, I find myself doing some work at home in the evening *while* watching TV – and it occurred to me recently that some of my favorite shows are set in law firms. Among them are “Damages” on FX, which features Glenn Close as high-stakes litigator Patty Hewes of New York City-based Hewes & Associates, and CBS' excellent new show “The Good Wife,” which stars Julianna Margulies as ambitious junior associate Alicia Florrick at Chicago-based Stern, Lockhart & Gardner.

Of course, these aren't *real* law firms. We know this because 1) they're on TV, 2) everyone looks gorgeous and alert, even when they are working late and 3) the ins and outs of daily firm operations are barely acknowledged amid all of the exciting things that Hewes, Florrick and their colleagues are doing.

On “The Good Wife,” in particular, there's always a hubbub of activity happening behind the foreground scenes featuring the show's principals. Everyone looks so darned productive – no wonder the firm is thriving! And, whenever Florrick or one of her colleagues needs to find a file or get key information *right this minute*, it's instantly available. All of the attorneys are clearly set up to succeed, with all of the requisite human assets and high-tech tools at their disposal. And the conference room always has fresh bagels and fruit sitting there waiting to be eaten every time that someone waltzes in there to have an impromptu but oh-so-important meeting. So, naturally, I find myself thinking: “Stern, Lockhart & Gardner must have a *really* good administrator running things.”

Sadly, the principal administrator at Stern, Lockhart & Gardner doesn't get much screen time on “The Good Wife.” But without him or her, I suspect Alicia Florrick and crew wouldn't be winning as many cases – or look so fabulous doing it. The business of law requires financial acumen, sound decision-making skills and the ability to balance short-term needs with what is required to achieve long-term success. ALA members – from principal administrators to executive directors to functional specialists in human resources and finance, among others – are integral to their organizations' successes, and it's vital for them to show their strategic value to their colleagues in their daily work.

In this issue's cover story (see page 26), Erin Brereton talks to several ALA members about how they show their worth to their organizations and reveals how you, too, can spotlight your everyday efforts – and the resulting benefits to your firms' managing partners and shareholders. Ultimately, administrators must ensure firm leaders know how crucial the legal administrator role is by routinely demonstrating their intrinsic value and by seeking more input into firm management and decision-making.

Television's fictional law firms may not showcase the importance of all that legal administrators do. But in real life, you can be your own best advocate. Take the initiative and reap the rewards.

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