

ENLIGHTENED



LEADERSHIP

BY ALBERT R. GLOVER

Legal administrators can achieve positive impacts on their firms' operations by embracing new ways of doing business and persuading their colleagues to do the same.

Law firms that fail to implement "enlightened leadership" consistently under-perform and never fully capitalize on their human capital. Enlightened leaders are consistently open to new ideas and willing to try something different. They have the courage to question existing ways of doing business and to persuade others to embrace new ideas.

Employees whose ideas are ignored or dismissed will never be motivated to achieve greater productivity or effectiveness. Some of the best ideas come from employees who work in the "trenches," but are rarely encouraged to speak up or feel uncomfortable making suggestions about how a business is run. By responding to employees' needs to be heard and recognized, owners will take a major step toward developing a more motivated workforce – one that translates into enhanced productivity, profitability and success.

SHORTCUT

By challenging individuals to achieve peak performance and embrace new ideas, enlightened leaders in legal departments and law firms cultivate an “ownership mentality” among employees and drive business success.

Non-legal staff in law offices and firms – in particular, administrators, executive directors and chief operating officers – face the key challenge of demonstrating the value that non-billable staff members bring to these businesses. Legal administrators, in particular, are obligated to bring to their firms the best business practices to meet goals.

Unfortunately, sometimes despite administrators’ best efforts, firm leaders simply don’t “get it,” and administrators must ascertain whether the situations are ones they can live with or it is time to find firms more compatible with their beliefs. If the former choice is made, however, the business ultimately fails to capitalize on its human capital, using human resources at a sub-optimal level.

THE PATH TO MAKING A DIFFERENCE

To facilitate change, organizations must understand the value of human capital and hire people who can lead. A leader must communicate the connection between organizational and individual values in the minds of its employees to fully capitalize on their individual talents and abilities. Failure to do so will eventually lead to an organization that cannot keep pace with or surpass its competition. By that point, it may be too late to regain the initiative.

Enlightened leaders embrace a strong set of beliefs and convictions, which provide a baseline that motivates employees. Often, individuals are reluctant to step out of their comfort zones, so it is essential that leaders encourage employees to have the courage to articulate their ideas and beliefs. Then, leaders must listen to what employees have to say. Whether or not their ideas are used, employees will feel valued because members of leadership have listened to them. Communicate with employees regularly and explain why ideas were not used in the context of overall organizational goals. If employees better understand organizational goals, their future ideas will be more focused and pertinent. This can only enhance employee morale, effectiveness, productivity and profitability.

No one goes to work with the expectation or desire to do less than a good job. Enthusiasm and a feeling of inclusion can easily be thwarted when the workplace is not a positive and professional environment. Anyone can follow an organization’s policies and procedures, but true innovation comes from people being accepted as vital participants within an organization. When one’s overtures and efforts are not desired or appreciated, it is difficult for one to feel “ownership” of an issue or problem.

Policies and processes typically provide a roadmap to achieve an objective, but employees sometimes must think in different ways (outside of the existing policies and processes) to achieve meaningful results. Many business owners fail to realize or appreciate that non-owners can make



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significant contributions to the organization. Yet in law firms where non-legal staff members are empowered to run the firm's business side, they often are – or have the potential to be – much more successful.

TAKING THE INITIATIVE

Within professional services organizations, effective use of human capital is especially essential to success. The collective talents, skills and knowledge of all law office and firm employees drive success, and their ideas must be heard so they may acquire the aforementioned ownership mentality. Self-motivated employees look for challenges and new opportunities to prove their worth and value, not only to themselves, but also to the organization. Failure to fully capitalize on this can only hurt the business. Senior law office leaders (both attorneys and non-attorneys) have an inherent responsibility to capitalize on the talents of their employees and to

give them opportunities to demonstrate their value to themselves and the organization. In turn, they must also be open to new ways of doing business if they truly want to succeed.

In any organization, one person can make a difference. And enlightened leaders who cultivate and bring out the talents and skills that all employees have to offer will be the most successful. The result will be a more productive, energetic and responsive staff – and a law firm that can easily meet the ever-increasing challenges and demands of a complex legal marketplace. ✱

about the author

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- *The Instant Manager: More Than 100 Quick Tips & Techniques for Great Results*, by Cy Charney
- *Responsible Managers Get Results*, by Gerald W. Faust, Richard I. Lyles and Will Phillips

The following are accessible via ALA's Legal Management Resource Center, <http://thesource.alanet.org>.

- "Your Leadership Report Card – How Do You Stack Up?" by Lawrence R. Richard – Type keyword "leadership" in the search engine
- "Leadership: Never Stop Learning," by Patricia Lane, CLM – Type keyword "leadership" in the search engine

On the Web

- *HR Magazine*, "HR Leadership is Key to Creating Better Workplaces" – http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m3495/is_8_49/ai_n6181402
- *HR Magazine*, "The Leadership Challenge Journal: Reflections on Becoming a Better Leader" – http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m3495/is_7_49/ai_n6127887

On the Shelf

The following titles are available for purchase or download through many online retailers, including www.amazon.com.

- *Leadership 101: What Every Leader Needs to Know*, by John C. Maxwell
- *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader: Becoming the Person Others Will Want to Follow*, by John C. Maxwell