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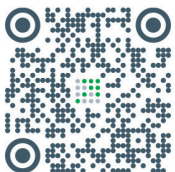- **39,000 lawyers and** legal professionals

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in this issue.

Leading In Tune

GEOFFREY M. WILLIAMS, CLM, MBA, MDIV
2023–2024 ALA President, Chief Operating Officer and Chief Financial Officer, Cunningham Bounds, LLC

One of the things I do for my mental health and recreation is compose music. Now, when you read that, you might conjure up an image of a mad musician hovering over the piano frantically scribbling notes on a page, or John Williams skillfully conducting the Boston Pops playing the music of the movies.

However, I am not such a composer. I neither scribble notes on a page nor conduct the Boston Pops. I do, however, have a few pianos of sorts that I use to create songs. They are basically computers in a piano-like keyboard structure connected to my main computer that houses an extensive library of sounds and related software. While I grew up playing brass instruments, I love to tickle the ivory or play the keys. I studied music theory in college while playing trumpet in several bands and the symphony, all the while banging away on a traditional piano. I ended up earning enough credits to claim a minor in music. Other than one piano class in college, I never had a lesson. I hated that piano class

because I play by ear and compose from the newer mindset that music emerges from the soul rather than the theory.

Music from the theory tends to constrict and conform expression according to arbitrary rules of Western styles that have taken hold over time. Theory is essential. But, like other forms of free expression that transcend traditional parameters, music from the soul is often freer and more authentic. Because of technology, sampling quality, decentralized platforms, and access to more musicians and distribution channels in the world today, more people are discovering musical expressions and genres that often break the traditional rules.

Some of these genres are labeled ambient, meditative, experimental, epic, beautiful, video game, movie trailer and sleep therapy music. They can evoke strong emotions, draw out different parts of the soul and affect health using all kinds of instruments, frequencies and sound sources. Every sound can be an instrument of some type — acoustic, electronic, organic, unusual vocal expression, the sounds of nature and

> *If your organization's mission and goals do not align with the current stakeholders' values, the organization will function more like a cacophony of chaotic noise rather than an orchestrated expression of music that captures the soul of its community.*
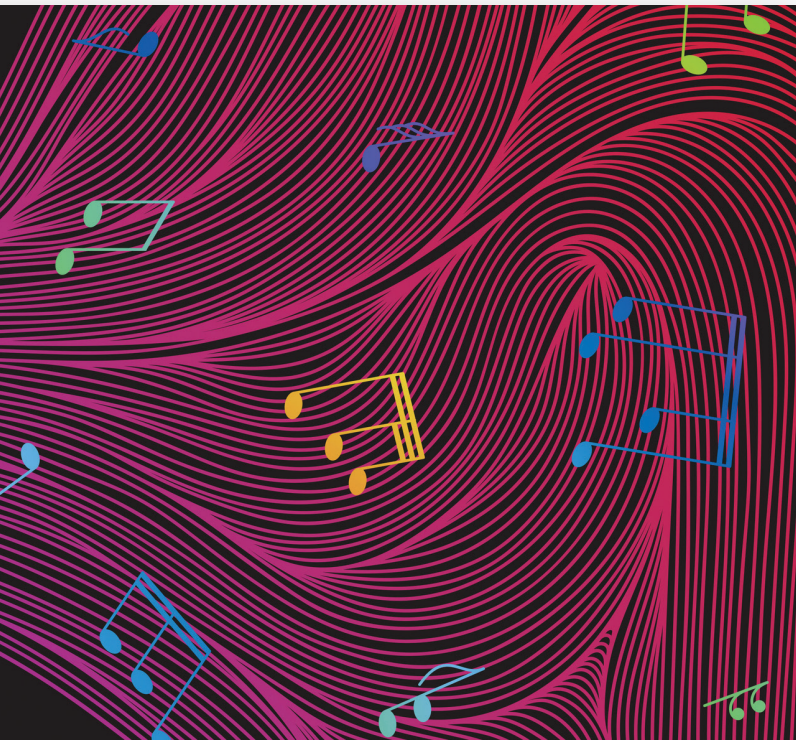
encounters with everyday objects, industry and urban life. In short, this music is comprehensively inclusive. While these genres might not be for everyone, everyone can find a genre for them.

LEADING IS LIKE COMPOSING MUSIC

It is significant to note that even in the newer genres that explore limits, we tend to hear songs using familiar chord progressions and patterns. They work, they are fundamental and people connect with them. I call these the fundamental values of music. But, progressive composers use the fundamentals in ways that relate to a modern listener, fill the need for free expression and expansive experiences, and are more in tune with modern ideas of what it means to consider the whole person and well-being by drawing from impulses from the body, mind, spirit, individuality, family and community.

So it is with leadership methods and styles — there are common and timeless elements. Effective leaders intentionally focus their energy and efforts on ensuring these fundamental elements are not disrupted in the organization. It works. People connect with them regardless of style, personality or specific natural attributes a particular leader might have — or lack.

However, modern leaders in the workplace reach maximum effectiveness and wider influence when they lead in relatable ways and consider the whole authentic person and well-being of the members of the workplace community. They draw out the best in those they lead. They find or create space for people to be themselves and find their place and embrace authenticity. They are in tune with the full person in their workforce.

FUNDAMENTAL ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES

We are all familiar with the practice of articulating the mission of an organization. Going deeper, what are the values from which the purpose derives and remains in times of trouble and in times of prosperity? In other words, consider why you have the mission you have. How does it translate into everyday decisions and actions? Who are the drivers of these values? How do they change, or should they evolve? Do they accurately reflect your firm's identity or aspirations, align with your stated purpose and distinguish you from others?

It is not enough to pay a limited wage for a job: Employees are not contractors or captive servants. They are members

of and contributors to your culture and success, players on your team, and investors into a shared vision. They enable your firm to carry out its mission. It is critical that values be identified, communicated and understood by everyone in the organization. People come from all walks of life and have their own source of values and identity. For example, the same value concept can have one meaning to one person and another meaning to another. Without illumination, you have assumptions that diminish inclusion and create separation that ultimately results in confusion and conflict. The purposed values of an organization should be the shared values in which everyone in the organization can invest.

The way leaders demonstrate and implement core values informs the firm culture. Motivation and inspiration occur to the degree that the culture, meaning and purpose of the organization align with function, activities and values of the individual. Good leadership illuminates where the fundamental values of a person and the fundamental values of an organization can intersect. This also means leaders must apply careful attention to the kinds of values that prevail and that they remain in tune.

Decisions related to employees must align with the firm's values, while evoking the employee's sense of being, motivations and inspiration to rise above challenges, push through problems, remain dedicated and loyal through hard times or promises of greener grass. Otherwise, the organization is tone deaf.

The stakeholders' values can change. This is an important element of the reiteration process, which has two fronts to balance: 1) restating and reinforcing established values, and 2) adjusting to or driving change in values. The process of reiteration determines whether the values from which the firm operates remain True North for the organization and its stakeholders. This is different from entropy because it is purposeful, thoughtful and proactive. Entropy is an erosion of values. Reiteration is strategic reinforcement and adjustment.

If your organization's mission and goals do not align with the current stakeholders' values, the organization will function more like a cacophony of chaotic noise rather than an orchestrated expression of music that captures the soul of its community. When an organization captures the soul, it gains loyalty, generates a feeling of belonging and possesses distinct strategic advantage. In short, when people belong and have a sense of unity, they take ownership and perform at a high level.

LEADERSHIP HARMONY

As leaders, it is our responsibility to advocate not only for the mission of our organizations, but also to take care of the community within. We are responsible for keeping it on course in both aspects. Instead of marching headstrong toward phantom, idealistic or outdated goals, we need to be stronghearted about leading toward the fulfillment of a mission, while being warmhearted about connecting at a deeper level with those who we expect to strive with us toward that end.

To do that, take the time to identify the values of the organization and what is important to the stakeholders. Find out if the priorities of the past remain relevant today. Align your culture, policies and procedures, and your workforce with current values by ensuring they are articulated, understood, communicated and upheld. Provide support and advocate for authenticity in your workforce so that people can bring their maximum contributions and unique perspectives to inform best practices, community experiences and have a sense of belonging.

Leading in tune means being in tune with the mission and getting all the players on the same page, even if it means breaking the mold of a theory or a tradition, or exploring new frontiers of engagement, how performance is measured, or how success is identified. It just might be music to everyone's ears. ∎

About the Author

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Successful Leaders Embody Strong Project Management

ERYN CARTER, CAE
Executive Director, Association of Legal Administrators

Most of us have been asked at some time in our lives to name a person who we believe is an example of a great leader. Harriet Tubman and Mahatma Gandhi are just a couple that come to mind for me.

But how many of us have ever been asked to name someone who we think is a great project manager? If we think about the qualities that make someone a great project manager, we may end up naming the same people we've identified as great leaders. Perhaps before anyone used the title, "project manager," there were people in that role who oversaw projects and engineered both the building and dismantling of industrial, political and social constructs that we can now see as legendary and have stood the test of time.

Effective leadership is critical to the success of any project. It involves setting the direction for the project, inspiring and motivating team members, managing resources, and making difficult decisions when necessary. The importance of leadership in project management is now widely viewed as essential to a project's success and endurance, and the key qualities that make a successful project leader are equally important to consider.

A good project leader has a clear vision of the project's goals and objectives and can communicate this effectively to the team. Dating back more than 2,200 years, the world-famous terra cotta warriors of China were built at the direction of China's Emperor Qin to guard his tomb and protect him in the afterlife. Discovered in the mid-1970s, the tomb complex encompasses 20 square miles and experts estimate there are more than 8,000 life-sized clay soldiers, 130 chariots and 670 horses. Researchers further estimate that it took more than 700,000 laborers to build the tomb with the clay army. The scale of the terra cotta warriors project rivals that of the pyramids of Egypt. Although Emperor Qin died

It's the leader's job to communicate the essence of what matters so that everyone is eager to link arms and work together.

before the tomb was complete, his team of engineers, artisans and laborers went ahead to finish its construction based on the clear vision that was communicated by Qin from the inception of the project and the strength of his leadership that was reinforced by others, even after his death. He embodied the qualities that define strong project management and leadership.

SUCCESSFUL PROJECT LEADERSHIP

With this in mind, I find there are several key qualities that make a successful project leader.

Vision

Skilled project leaders have a clear vision of the project's goals and objectives and can communicate this effectively to the team. They can then adapt their vision to changing circumstances and solicit input and feedback from diverse perspectives to inform their decisions.

Communication

Effective communication is critical to successful project management and project leaders can communicate clearly and

effectively with stakeholders at all levels of the project lifecycle. Leaders can adapt their communication style to the needs of different stakeholders and manage conflict and resolve issues through effective communication. It's the leader's job to communicate the essence of what matters so that everyone is eager to link arms and work together.

There is no such thing as over communication. Repeating the plan — no matter how redundant the messaging — is critical to a project's success. In fact, the Chief Executive Officer of Hilton Worldwide, Christopher Nassetta, says this about the importance of communication: "As a leader, you could find yourself communicating the same thing so many times that you get tired of hearing it. What might sound mundane and like old news to me isn't for a lot of other people. So, an important lesson I've learned is the need to constantly communicate the strategy."

Collaboration

Successful project management requires a collaborative approach, and a good project leader can build and maintain

strong, trusting relationships with stakeholders. They can foster a culture of teamwork because they understand that teams are the key to driving the strategy. Without having to express it explicitly, teammates typically want the same thing: to have each other's backs. Leaders of project teams must be able to establish that this is the environment they are committed to fostering and what they expect of everyone.

Risk Management

Effective project management requires a proactive approach to risk management, and a good project leader can identify potential risks and develop strategies to mitigate and manage them. They can formulate and adapt their risk management approach to changing circumstances and priorities, while continuing to chart a course toward the desired outcome.

Problem Solving

Projects are inherently complex and dynamic, and a good project leader can think critically and solve problems creatively. Anticipating and addressing potential problems before they arise is essential. However, so is managing conflict that arises from problems and resolving it quickly to avoid getting consumed by the impact of a particular problem and losing momentum.

Successful project management coupled with successful leadership serves to inspire, motivate and empower everyone to do their best work and contribute to common goals. ALA's community of members, business partners and staff routinely exhibit these qualities and strive to continue to work together to ensure the work we are doing today has a long-lasting and profound impact on the legal management profession. ∎

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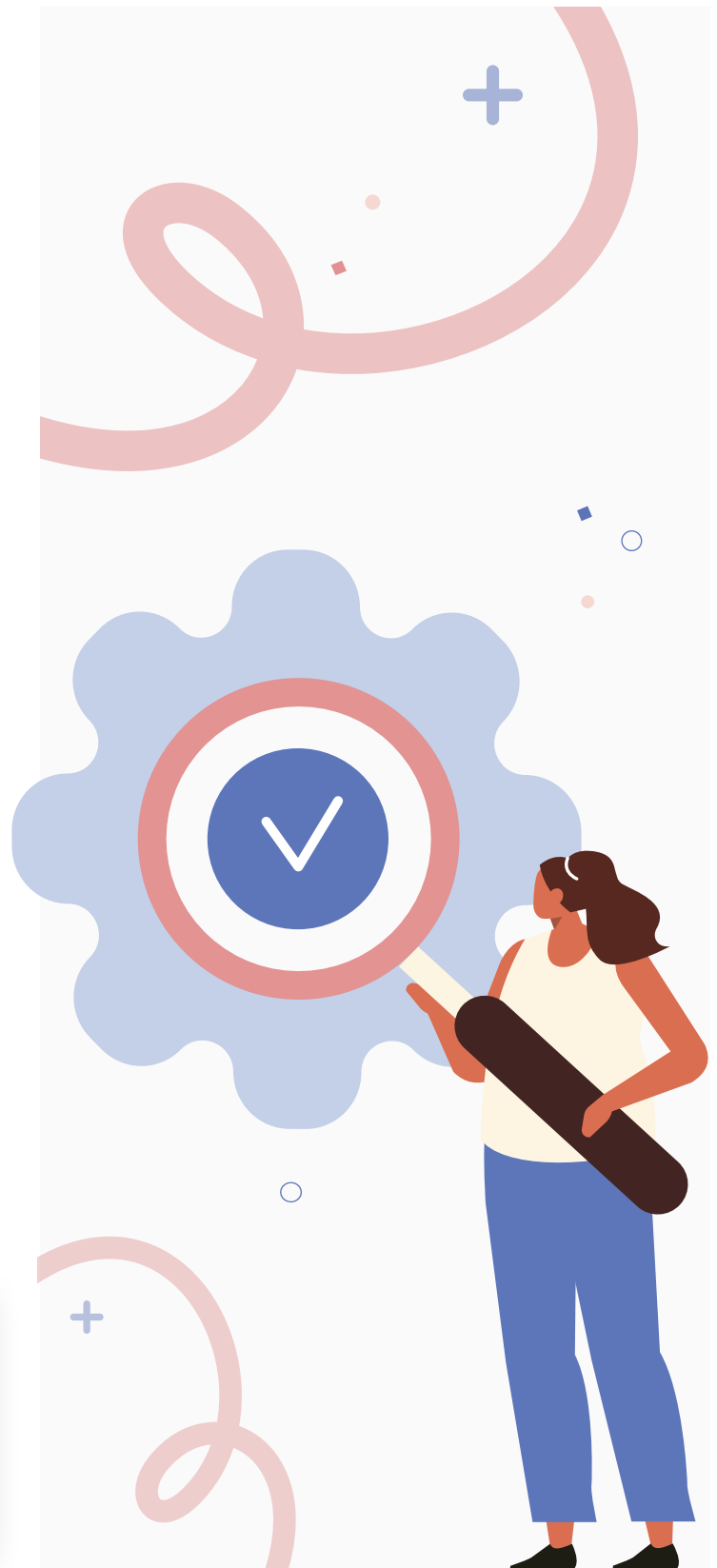
Strategic Presence: A Better Way to Lead

JACQUELINE FARRINGTON
Founder and President, Farrington Partners

For decades, leaders have pursued executive presence to secure credibility and more senior roles. In HCI's recent survey,[*] 77% of HR professionals noted that people with high executive presence advance more quickly.

And yet, executive presence remains an ill-defined, limiting standard, often criticized for its lack of inclusivity. The term implies leaders must demonstrate specific characteristics and behaviors traditionally associated with white male leaders, such as assertiveness, confidence and charisma. However, these traits may not align with the diverse range of leadership styles, cultural backgrounds and individual identities in modern workplaces. As one of my coaching clients put it: "I feel like I have to leave my 'Asianess' at the door."

There's a better way to lead. I call it strategic presence.

WHAT IS STRATEGIC PRESENCE?

Strategic presence is the ability to intentionally adjust how you show up in different situations to meet your audience's needs and help them hear your message. Unlike executive presence, it isn't about molding yourself to fit a specific set of criteria. Instead, it's an inside-out approach to leadership deeply rooted in your most fundamental nature. It calls on you to activate your values, identity and purpose:

- **Values:** Allowing your central beliefs and tenets to guide your actions and decisions signals integrity and decisiveness.

- **Identity:** Tapping into your identities — whether related to social roles, race, gender, nationality, religion or cultural heritage — can ground you, express cultural competency, and indicate congruency.

- **Purpose:** Operating with a meaningful life mission demonstrates confidence and vision.

*tracom.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/HCIReportTalentPulseTRACOM.pdf

> *That's why employing strategic presence cultivates empathy naturally. Leaders must learn to read and interpret subtle cues from others and the business context to choose an approach that meets the moment's needs.*

USING STRATEGIC PRESENCE

Leaders must ask themselves important questions about the message they need their audience to hear, how they need to show up for that specific audience, and how they can adjust their presence. These include:

1. What messages do I need this audience to hear?

2. For this message to be heard with this audience, how do I need to show up?

3. How does this compare to my habitual way of showing up?

4. Which of my values do I need to amplify in this situation?

5. What identities can I tap into to connect with this audience?

6. What changes may I need to make around:

   a. **Language choices:** Should my words be academic? Conversational? Inspirational?

   b. **Tone of voice:** Should my tone be humble? Humorous? Authoritative?

   c. **Body language:** Should I be formal or relaxed in body language? Expressive or more subdued?

   d. **Clothing:** Should my look be refined, unpretentious or creative?

   e. **Interaction style:** Should I be a transmitter (delivering content) or a receiver (listening deeply)? Or both?

   f. **Thinking style:** Should I focus more on the big picture or on details?

   g. **Decision-making style:** Should I drive the final decisions or seek consensus?

Contrary to the perception of inauthentic leadership, adapting behaviors to suit the situation enhances authenticity, because your actions are grounded in your values and identities. Genuine leadership is not about maintaining a fixed persona, but rather about being sensitive to the context. Maintaining an unwavering persona doesn't equate to genuine leadership, but sensitivity to context does.

That's why employing strategic presence cultivates empathy naturally. Leaders must learn to read and interpret subtle cues

from others and the business context to choose an approach that meets the moment's needs.

Successful leadership in any law firm requires inspiring and motivating others, driving change, making strategic decisions and fostering an inclusive work culture. Leveraging strategic presence enhances crucial skills to achieve those goals in the following ways:

1. **Impactful communication:** Strategic presence equips leaders with practical communication skills, enabling them to convey their vision, values and expectations clearly and persuasively to various audiences.

2. **Building effective relationships:** By understanding and appreciating different perspectives, leveraging emotional intelligence, and demonstrating cultural competence, leaders build trust, collaboration and mutual respect.

3. **Situational awareness:** Tying your presence to situational needs means learning to read the room and adjusting your approach, promoting resilience and agility.

4. **Adapting to change:** Because they're already familiar with adapting their styles, leaders are more likely to embrace innovation, promote a growth mindset and effectively guide their teams through transitions.

5. **Personal and professional growth:** Leaders are more self-aware, seek feedback and actively develop their leadership capabilities aligned with their values and purpose. This commitment to development enables them to stay relevant, inspire their teams and continuously elevate their leadership effectiveness.

Practicing strategic presence doesn't mean turning your back on any single quality like charisma. It means choosing the right tools to express your unique leadership style at any given moment. By cultivating a robust strategic presence, you'll enhance all your leadership overall. ∎

About the Author

Jacqueline Farrington is Founder and President of Farrington Partners and has over 20 years' experience as a change maker, empowering leaders and their teams to spark transformation and innovation through communications. She works with senior and board-level leaders at multinationals like Amazon and Microsoft. Farrington's new book, *The Non-Obvious Guide to Better Presentations: How to Present Like a Pro (Virtually or in Person)*, provides actionable, practical concepts, tips and tools to improve any speech or presentation.

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Transforming Practice Group Leaders into Revenue-Focused Leaders

DAVID H. FREEMAN, JD
Founder, Lawyer BookBuilder

It's not fair to ask someone who's never danced to perform a beautiful pirouette. It's not reasonable to expect someone who's never hit a tennis ball to strike a solid backhand. Similarly, it's not logical to ask a group leader who's never managed a sales team to turn their lawyers into great rainmakers.

Every firm needs a pipeline of new work; yet little training is given to practice group leaders, department heads and office managing partners on how to specifically manage and lead these efforts. So much money is being left on the table: Imagine the differentiated level of revenue and profitability you would achieve if your leaders had the skills to inspire your lawyers to take more — and better — revenue-focused actions.

It's first important to recognize the population your leaders are working with. When it comes to client development, most lawyers are untrained, unfocused and not accountable. They need better skills, guidance and discipline to tap into their potential. In this article, we'll explore several ways lawyer-

leaders can up their games to become high-impact, revenue-focused leaders. The following are some key areas to develop.

SENIOR LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

Without endorsement from the top, major initiatives often die. Senior leaders must demonstrate the importance of developing revenue-focused leaders through their actions, such as providing training, tying recognition and compensation to business development activities, and playing the role of "watchers" to make sure commitments are made and completed.

TRAINING

As stated earlier, few leaders possess this specialized skill set, so it's important to give them the knowledge and tools they truly need. I've found that general leadership training may not be enough, and approaches that come from other industries often do not resonate well with our leaders.

Find programs that speak to the unique issues and opportunities of our profession and that focus on how to

> *While many firms emphasize some levels of operational excellence, it is the rare few that are laser-focused on mastering the art of revenue-focused leadership.*

effectively manage the selling efforts of lawyers. Some of the skills your leaders can learn include:

- Developing and communicating firmwide, department and group strategy
- Getting lawyers to create effective individual business development plans
- Setting goals and measures
- Establishing a mindset of delivering outstanding levels of client service
- Maximizing cross-selling efforts
- Imposing accountability and driving implementation
- Providing coaching and feedback
- Maintaining focus and enthusiasm
- Running effective business development meetings

LAWYER BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT PLANS WITH ACCOUNTABILITY

In most businesses, holding salespeople accountable to their commitments is one of the most important functions of the business. Yet in law firms, client development is often one of the least watched activities.

To overcome this, require your lawyers to build useful plans, with an emphasis on identifying the actions they will take to make their plans a reality. While many firms ask for such plans, they are often 30,000-foot fuzzy strategies instead of practical step-by-step blueprints for action. To provide the proper guidance, leaders should ask their lawyers to establish measurable goals and tactics, drilling down to who will do what, by when.

Unlocking the potential that lives in those plans requires accountability. That means creating a check-in process where your lawyers know they're being watched and there are consequences for nonperformance. For leaders with large groups and limited bandwidth, they can delegate the check-in process to a staff member, administrator, marketing professional or a "deputized" lawyer in the group who can serve in that role, who reports the results back to the leader.

PARTNER BUY-IN

Little will happen if lawyers don't want to do it. To get your lawyers to accept a sales management process, they must buy into the reasons for it.

This can be accomplished by guiding them through a collaborative planning session, where they will come to understand why it is needed, and they will also have a hand in crafting what their sales management process looks like. It also allows you to get their "permission" to be watched, reminded and tracked when it comes to implementing their actions. From there, taking it down to the individual lawyer level through planning and coaching will tailor group plans to their personal needs and goals.

CROSS-CONNECTIONS WITH OTHER PARTS OF THE FIRM

If your firm has complementary practices and/or several locations, there are often untapped synergies that are ripe for the picking. Leaders and their groups should study the firm's top clients to identify which have potential for cross-practice or cross-office work. Then, the lawyers managing those relationships should meet with the lawyer(s) who might receive the cross-work to discuss how to make it happen.

Once a plan is created, meetings should be scheduled with clients to learn whether the firm can serve them in the new area(s), and after that, the newly introduced lawyer(s) should continually (albeit elegantly) follow up to stay top-of-mind. Leaders must track these activities to make sure each step is fully implemented.

Focus on client service: This is a subtle but powerful area. In my experience, while most lawyers *believe* they deliver good if not superior levels of service, it's not always enough to keep clients from looking elsewhere. Leaders should engage their lawyers in collaborative brainstorming and planning exercises to identify what "wow" levels of service truly look like in order to protect important relationships from being poached by other firms.

Maintaining momentum with internal public relations and incentives: Getting off to a fast start is crucial. Lawyers watch the actions of their leaders during the honeymoon period, so the first few months of any new initiative can make or break its success. Report on sustained, consistent action to demonstrate the firm's resolve to follow through on its plan.

Leaders must also reinforce desired behaviors, which can be done through stories — stories of where lawyers are acting in alignment with the good of the firm, the good of the client and their personal success. Leaders must capture and communicate these stories of culturally desired behaviors to keep the momentum going strong.

Lawyers and leaders can also be incentivized through economic rewards and public recognition for efforts that align with being a good citizen of the firm.

It's not the practice of law that is the great differentiator in our profession, but rather a firm's ability to employ superior systems, skills and discipline. While many firms emphasize some levels of operational excellence, it is the rare few that are laser-focused on mastering the art of revenue-focused leadership. The opportunities are huge for those who go all in. ■

About the Author

David H. Freeman, JD, is a member of the National Law Journal Hall of Fame for being voted the top law firm business development coach and consultant in the United States for several consecutive years. He is a two-time best-selling author who has written and co-authored 14 books on law firm leadership and business development and has trained and coached over 10,000 lawyers and leaders in hundreds of firms worldwide. Additionally, he is the creator of Lawyer BookBuilder®, an online, self-study program that shows lawyers how to transform themselves into major rainmakers.

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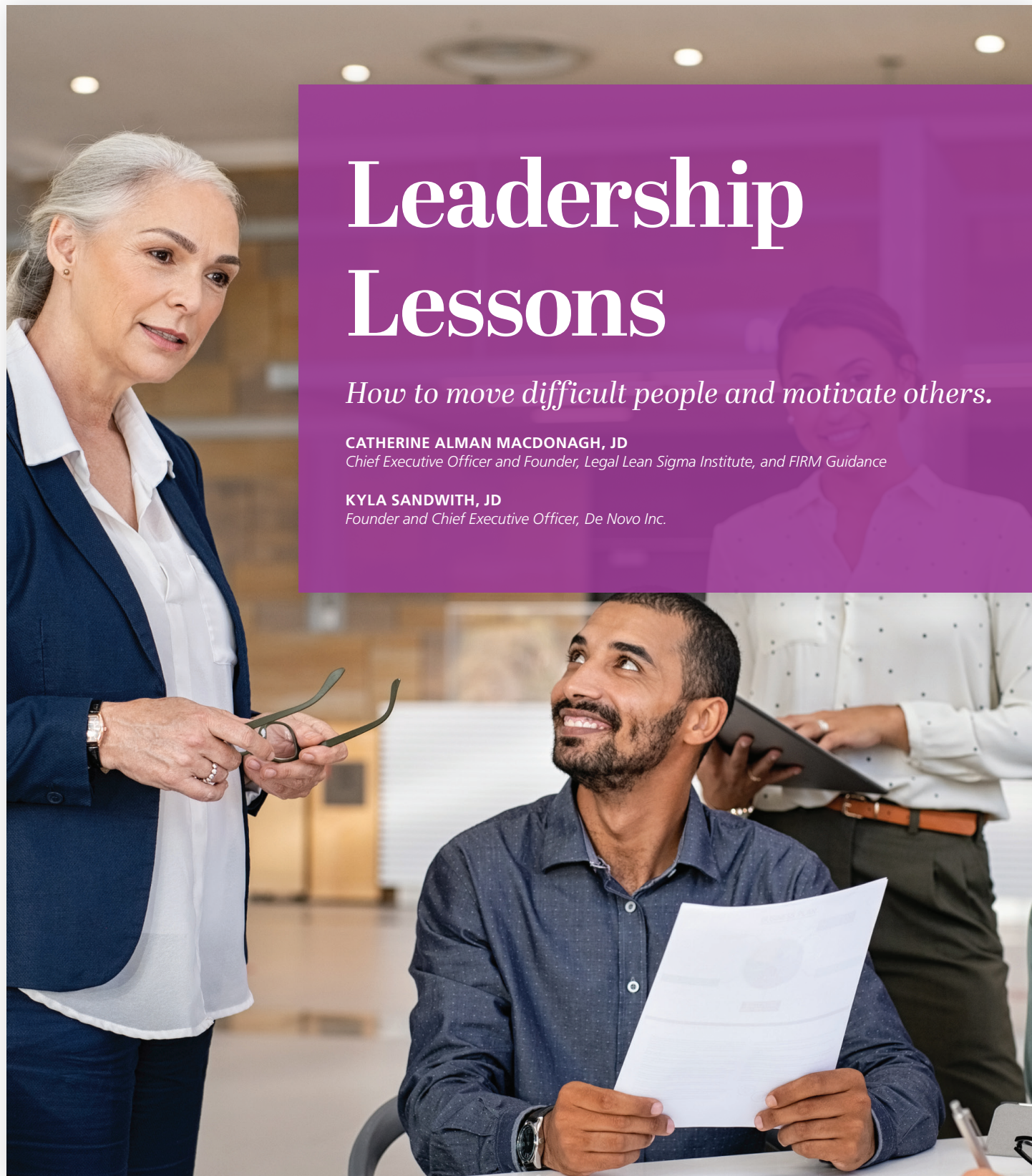
Leadership Lessons

How to move difficult people and motivate others.

CATHERINE ALMAN MACDONAGH, JD
Chief Executive Officer and Founder, Legal Lean Sigma Institute, and FIRM Guidance

KYLA SANDWITH, JD
Founder and Chief Executive Officer, De Novo Inc.

Whether you are leading a team through a project or more generally trying to motivate your team toward success, it can feel a lot like herding cats — especially in a legal environment. However, by using tools to assess the people you're leading and then selecting the right approach to motivate and move them — yes, even the difficult ones — you can conduct like a maestro.

We all know that different things work for different people. Carrots are preferred by most, yet sticks are often the first thing we think of when trying to get people to comply with anything. With talent wars, quiet quitting, generational differences, client demands, and the economy and market drivers creating a lot of pressure, it's time to try some new approaches.

PEOPLE FIRST. THEN PROCESS — THEN PLATFORM —

We highly recommend using tools that help assess an organization's current state, maturity, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats and capacity for change. It is also vital that we get to know the people with whom we are working — what they care about, how they are hardwired, where they are experiencing pain points, and how they could be working even better together.

"People are the greatest asset of any organization and key stakeholders ought to be engaged when leaders are making organizational decisions. Those who are close to the areas can inform as to how and where changes in strategic or operational areas will impact an organization," says Frederick J. Esposito, CLM, MBA, Chief Operating Officer at Rivkin Radler LLP and member of the New York City Chapter. "The insights and ideas that people are eager to contribute are invaluable. Leaders may not use all the input provided, but this approach empowers people and gets critical buy-in for change."

There are many good options available to us and we use many different approaches; this is a short list of our most effective "go-to" favorites, and we are happy to teach you how to use them.

P+ Scorecard™
An organizational assessment tool we developed and use to find out how individuals, teams, groups, leaders and other stakeholders view the organization in critical "P" areas, such as:

• Process improvement
• Project management
• Pricing and profitability
• People
• Performance management
• Performance metrics
• Practice management and innovation
• Position/net promotor score

We use this to find out how different people assess and experience capabilities in each area. Where are there gaps? Where do we have alignment? Where can we find examples of excellence and best practices to employ across the organization? Once we know, we can develop a plan, timeline and budget for making progress to a measurable goal.

P+ Scorecard™	1 Clear competitive advantage	2 Some notable successes, improvements underway	3 Few successes, no plan to address	4 Clearly holds us back
Process Improvement *We do the right things, the right way, the first time, every time*				
Project Management *We manage expectations and minimize surprises internally and externally*				
Pricing and Profitability *We know the costs and market value of our services*				
People *Our lawyers and staff are fully aligned with our strategy*				
Performance Management *We drive and reward behaviors that lead to long-term health of the organization*				
Performance Metrics *We establish, track and share key performance indicators to improve performance*				
Practice Management and Innovation *We're proactive in re-engineering our work*				

© Legal Lean Sigma Institute LLC. Developed in Collaboration with the Corcoran Consulting Group.

Figure 1: P+ Scorecard

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI)
With a proven record of reliability spanning more than 50 years, the MBTI offers a foundation for understanding individual differences and applying that understanding to the ways people think, communicate and interact.

"

Assessment is the first critical step in moving individuals, teams and organizations through change. Once we have this knowledge, we are well equipped to build on it and support your success as a leader of change and innovation.

"

The assessment identifies eight personality preferences, which are organized into four dichotomies. Those four preferences you identify as being most "like you" are combined into what is called a type. Within each type, there is a range in strength of preferences, which is important because even though two people might be the same type, it is highly unlikely that they will have the same strength of preferences in any one of the four dichotomies. In other words, each individual is unique; the assessment shows us where there are natural strengths and potential blind spots.

Individual reports can also be rolled up to generate a team type. This informs us as to the kind of decision-making model the team will use as a standard approach. In this way, the team can include everyone and leverage its strengths and also incorporate countermeasures to guard against hasty or poor decisions.

We use the MBTI for:

- Team development
- Identifying learning styles
- Career choice
- Conflict management
- Stress management
- Leadership and management development
- Improving communication
- Coaching and relationship counseling

Communication Styles and Buyer Personality Types
Being able to identify communication styles and personality types allows people to quickly build rapport, prepare for and improve interactions, meetings, etc. This analysis is critical for

high-performing, high-functioning teams. This helps us select and facilitate building team members in many contexts:

- Team selection and management
- Face to face and virtual meetings
- Presentations, seminars and speeches
- Process improvement and other projects
- Client service and business development
- Writing
- Teaching, training and coaching
- Personal lives

Buyer Personality Types (Driver, Analytical, Amiable, Expressive)
Most people will have a major and minor type. When we can identify the major type and "talk to that type," we make it easier for the other person to understand and accept what we are proposing:

- Driver — Fact-Based Extrovert
- Analytical — Fact-Based Introvert
- Amiable — Relationship Introvert
- Expressive — Relationship Extrovert

Communication Styles (Neuro-Linguistic Programming)
When you understand how we take in and process information, consider:

- Visual (pictures, mental images)
- Auditory (words, sounds)
- Kinesthetic (feeling based, physical memory)

Assessment is the first critical step in moving individuals, teams and organizations through change.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Research shows that lawyers tend to be highly autonomous and skeptical; they have a high need for control and a highly developed penchant for abstract reasoning. These characteristics do not generally create an environment that willingly embraces the kind of change that naturally comes with progress, improvements and transformation.

While there are many change management models, what lies at the heart of each is the aim to move people from a state of resistance through to acceptance and full-scale adoption. This is no easy feat.

Anyone involved with process improvement or change management knows that there's often a group of people who readily embrace or accept the change. These people are often the ones who were already aware of the problem and had, or now have, a deep desire to address it. From the leader's perspective, these are the people who "just get it." Unfortunately, if we've followed best practices and established a diverse team or we have a diverse environment within which we want to implement change, there will be many who don't "just get it."

Figure 2: Top 5 Change Management Models
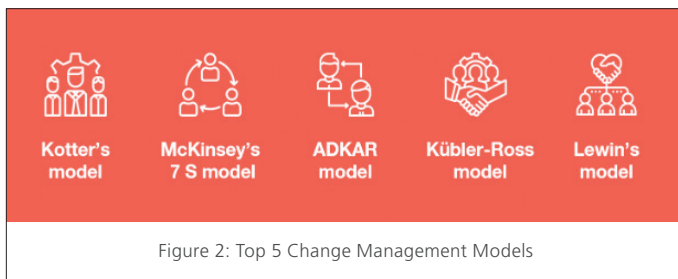
The challenge for leaders is to avoid allowing this resistance to derail us but instead embrace it as an opportunity — an opportunity not only to grow as a leader but to utilize this resistance to deliver greater results.

Leading teams that think, perceive the world and act like we do is easy. That said, the output from these teams tends to be mediocre. The beauty and strength of diverse, high-functioning teams comes from the team's ability to leverage the unique and diverse skills, perspectives and strengths of

> *For leaders to be effective they must have the ability to both recognize their own emotions and use that information to inform their responses in a way that moves them and their team closer to their goals.*

individual team members to produce results that are greater than the sum of its parts. This is a primary reason we believe so strongly in the frameworks of process improvement and project management — change management is literally baked into the way we do and deliver our work.

Figure 3: DMAIC, the framework for process improvement projects, is nicely aligned with the ADKAR change management model.
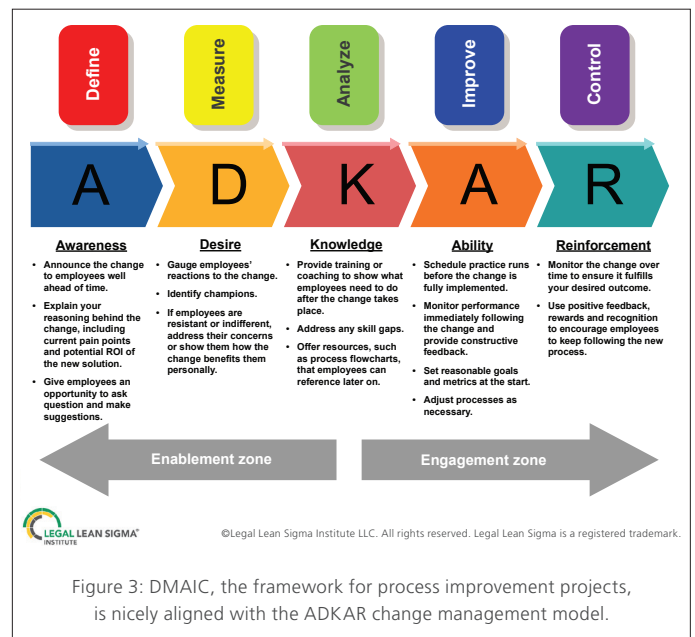
HOW CAN LEADERS EMBRACE THOSE WHO CHALLENGE US?

Start with Self-Awareness
Before we can determine how best to respond to individuals

who challenge us, we need to first understand our own experience in the face of this challenge.

For leaders to be effective, they must have the ability to both recognize their own emotions and use that information to inform their responses in a way that moves them and their team closer to their goals. This is the essence of emotional intelligence, and it starts with self-awareness.

Look Within

The first critical step when challenged by a team member or stakeholder is to understand how that behavior impacts us emotionally. Often resistance from others makes us question our own abilities or worry that this resistance will derail the project and lead to failure, which ultimately creates fear.

Take some time when you are calm to journal or consider the emotions that arise when you engage with this person. The key is to approach this nonjudgmentally and to be honest about the root causes of our feelings (fear of failure, feeling incapable or unworthy). This approach has strong parallels to process improvement frameworks — we need to understand the problem fully to effectively brainstorm solutions.

Reframe Our Experience

When we work from fear or a sense of inadequacy (some might refer to this as Imposter Syndrome, and it is a very real feeling), our options for moving forward become limited. We become hyper-focused on eliminating the fear and demonstrating our competence rather than generating creative solutions. So, it's important to reframe our emotions in a way that will serve us and our teams.

Consider how we might reframe our experience from fear-based to something more motivating. For example, we reframe our frustration with someone questioning or opposing us all the time by embracing it as an opportunity to build our leadership and persuasion skills. Alternatively, start seeing these challenging behaviors as an opportunity to better understand and embrace different perspectives and support better project outcomes. Reframing the experience in this way will help remove the emotional charge of these interactions and allow us to respond more strategically.

Consider the Impact

Another technique to remove the emotional charge from these interactions is to consider what might happen if we did nothing to change the dynamic with this person. Often, we focus on the perceived threat this person creates but fail to consider the impact of allowing the negative dynamic to continue. Recognizing that the dysfunctional dynamic will not only impact us but the functioning of the team as well as the health of the project may create the motivation needed to respond more productively.

TIME FOR ACTION

Once we've reduced the emotional charge of the situation and are motivated to respond to the challenge in a way that supports our team and the project, the next step is to consider how to effectively embrace that challenge.

Pull Your Opposites Closer

One technique is to pull our opposites closer. Often those who challenge us have different perspectives, approaches, values and needs. In actively working to embrace those differences, understand and empathize with them, we create the opportunity to uncover skills, knowledge and perspectives that will raise team performance. Moreover, creating an environment where they feel valued and heard leads to increased engagement and collaboration and raises

"

The beauty and strength of diverse, high-functioning teams comes from the team's ability to leverage the unique and diverse skills, perspectives and strengths of individual team members to produce results that are greater than the sum of its parts.

"

the level of trust among the team. This is also an excellent way to demonstrate a real commitment to inclusion.

Ask for Advice

Interpersonal dynamics can be incredibly challenging and complex, and too often we approach leadership as a solo sport. However, the best leaders reach out to mentors, coaches and other trusted leaders to seek advice, especially when dealing with challenging relationships. Some leaders may even seek their own advice. By considering what advice they would give to another leader in similar circumstances, leaders can approach the situation more objectively and build confidence in their own abilities to overcome these challenges over the long term.

Continue to Improve

Much like process improvement and project management frameworks, continuous improvement should inform our leadership approach to these challenging dynamics.

When initial efforts fail to hit the mark and deliver intended results, good leaders go back to better understand the problem and uncover root causes they missed. They use that information to brainstorm and test new approaches and solutions to leadership challenges for better results over time.

Leaders can employ many tools. By becoming masterful at selecting and employing the right approaches for the situation at hand, you will build higher performing and functioning teams by motiving and leading through any scenario.

As with leadership, implementing these tools and techniques is not easy. However, with continued effort, over time you may just find that the person who was the greatest naysayer becomes the biggest champion of the project — and of you. ■

About the Author

Catherine Alman MacDonagh, JD, is the Chief Executive Officer and Founder of Legal Lean Sigma Institute and of FIRM Guidance Consulting, a Co-Founder of the Legal Sales and Service Organization, and a member of ALA's Professional Development Advisory Committee.

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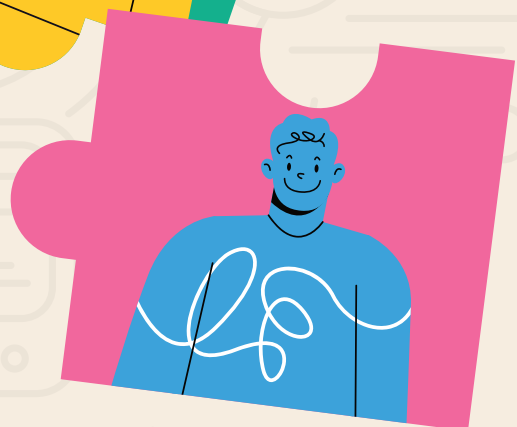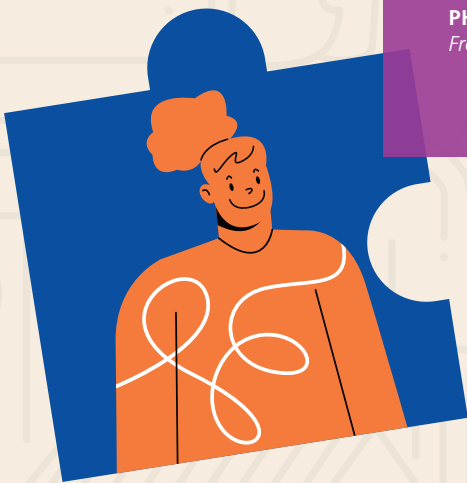
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Are You a Great Leader?

Leaders have the power to make — or break — worker morale. How do you stack up?

PHILLIP M. PERRY
Freelance Business Writer

As the workforce undergoes profound change, great leaders are more important than ever. Job candidates are increasingly concerned about a prospective employer's workplace culture — and are assisted in their prehire assessments by company reviews on the internet. Gen Zers, the fastest-growing segment of the nation's workforce, is famously concerned about fair treatment, and favor employers whose management dynamics include diversity, equity and inclusion.

It stands to reason that law firms large and small must respond to societal trends by transforming their environments in ways that satisfy the needs of their staff. Great leaders — by energizing their teams through the power of emotional intelligence — do just that. Here are five qualities that stronger leaders embody.

1. Leaders look forward.

While a manager is someone who controls peoples' tasks to reach specific goals, the leader fills a much more encompassing role. Their daily focus is not so much on manipulating productivity and profit numbers as on motivating their teams to achieve peak performance. That requires a "people first" mentality.

"Great leaders take a philanthropic approach," says Holly K. Pulido, Chief Operating Officer at Slack Davis Sanger LLP, and a Director on ALA's International Board of Directors. "They know it's not about them; it's about their teams. So they are empathetic. They lead by example. And they encourage autonomy [while] at the same time they get everyone moving as a single unit."

Such efforts demand a mastery of the soft people skills that drive a work environment to peak performance. "Great leaders invest in the employee, not just in what the employee does," says Pulido. "At the same time, those investments in people encourage return investments in the firm."

2. Leaders inspire people.

Investing in people starts with expressions of genuine interest in their lives, learning such details as their children's names and what they are passionate about.

But it also migrates into their professional ambitions, helping them advance their careers by using such tools as mentoring, coaching and continuing education programs.

"Unlike a manager, a leader creates opportunities to promote staff members and to move forward as a group," says Pulido.

Larger firms often have leadership and management training built into their model. Smaller ones frequently take a more organic approach. Pulido, for example, has established lunch and learns where people are given the opportunity to expand their knowledge. "Maybe I have some new software, and I ask for a volunteer to try the demo and report back to the team," she says. "A lot of people will jump on the chance to have a say in informing our firm's policies and practices."

She also started an incentive program that awards raises to anyone achieving certification in approved education programs. "I tell people, 'I want your resume to look so good that other firms try to poach you. And I want you to be so happy here that you tell them, 'Hell no.'"

Creating teams of such inspired employees requires an ability to listen and respond to their concerns. "We hear a lot today about disgruntled employees and the quiet quitters," says Pulido. "Those people don't feel heard; they don't feel important."

The cure for performance malaise is for the firm's management to put people first. "If you invest the time to listen to your staff you can help them identify what they want to become, and help them get there," says Pulido. "And there's no risk of them leaving, because they realize they got their new skills from their current firm, and they want to invest back into it."

3. Leaders track data.

The great leader inspires other people, supports their professional advancement and projects a genuine concern for their well-being. But that leader must also be bold in making informed decisions that move the firm forward.

"Law firm leaders can increase their effectiveness by basing their decisions on data that show what is happening with the organization's workforce," says Amy Born, Chief Research and Innovation Officer at consulting firm Leading Edge. Hiring and attrition rates, and the results of exit interviews, can reveal long-term underlying dissonances that are eroding the organization's effectiveness.

Engagement surveys can be particularly useful, notes Born. They measure people's desire to stay with the firm, their level of pride about being affiliated with their employer, and whether they would recommend their work environment to job candidates.

However, engagement surveys will only be useful if they address conditions the firm is *willing* to change. Born noted that communication at most organizations is a challenge and it's almost always something that can be improved.

"A survey might ask respondents to assess their agreement with such statements as, *'We have effective upwards communication; I feel comfortable speaking up to a person in a position of leadership. I feel like I have the information I need to do my job. I feel included in decisions that impact me.'"* Born says responses to such surveys can be collated and studied as important tools for improving a firm's internal communications.

Still other data points can inform assessments of leadership quality. One might be the percentage of staff members who are assigned to team projects — an event that can improve morale and upward mobility.

"If a person is not able to do their best work because they are never being assigned to team projects, that can be a reflection on their supervisor," says Born. "That can be valuable information, because we want leaders who focus on developing their people and promoting them into good places."

4. Leaders humanize decisions.
Hard data is not enough — they must be subjected to the human touch. "Great leaders make decisions that are data-informed, not data driven," says Born. She recommends

following up survey results with one-on-one conversations that reveal the normally hidden emotions that can affect workplace performance. The results of those conversations can themselves become data points that inform higher level decisions.

"Sometimes the qualitative stuff is easy to overlook, especially when firms are used to being driven by billable hours and revenue and other hard numbers," says Born. "But it's a coupling of the hard data and the soft data, I think, that really matters when it comes to your people and your team." While periodic pulse surveys can uncover hidden dissonances that are eroding employee morale, Born recommended more detailed annual ones.

"I think it's incredibly valuable to have an understanding of how people's experience at work is changing over the long term." And it's important to know if those changes are firm-wide, or in certain geographic areas or workforce categories.

5. Leaders know when to change course.
Great leaders make bold decisions. No one is perfect, however, and the best plans can fall short of their goals. At such times, there must be a willingness to fail, and to learn from mistakes.

"Sometimes when I lead my team, I think I have a really good, can't-lose idea," says Pulido. "It ends up flopping terribly, and I have to come back and say, 'At least we tried. Let's reconstruct what happened. Let's use this as a learning opportunity.' That's falling on your sword and being accountable."

Pulido gives an example. "Last year I had the idea that each month every staff member would give a presentation about something they liked that was outside of work The goal was to get to know one another better, which is important for teamwork. I was so excited about the idea that I neglected to recognize people have different personality types. Some are very private and are not comfortable speaking in front of a group." Pulido says another employee brought it to her attention; they noted another colleague was not excited about the assignment.

Rate Your Leadership Skills

How well have you mastered the skills of great leadership? To find out, answer the 10 questions in this quiz. Total your score and check your rating at the bottom.

1. **I take a personal interest in my employees.**

   Never: 0   Seldom: 4   Often: 8   Regularly: 10

2. **I assist employees in rebounding from performance shortfalls.**

   Never: 0   Seldom: 4   Often: 8   Regularly: 10

3. **I help employees advance their careers.**

   Never: 0   Seldom: 4   Often: 8   Regularly: 10

4. **I listen well.**

   Never: 0   Seldom: 4   Often: 8   Regularly: 10

5. **I encourage autonomy while getting people working as a single unit.**

   Never: 0   Seldom: 4   Often: 8   Regularly: 10

6. **I lead by example.**

   Never: 0   Seldom: 4   Often: 8   Regularly: 10

7. **I learn from my mistakes and seek staff feedback.**

   Never: 0   Seldom: 4   Often: 8   Regularly: 10

8. **I inform my decisions with data.**

   Never: 0   Seldom: 4   Often: 8   Regularly: 10

9. **I enlighten data with one-on-one interviews.**

   Never: 0   Seldom: 4   Often: 8   Regularly: 10

10. **I make an effort to spot and promote potential leaders.**

    Never: 0   Seldom: 4   Often: 8   Regularly: 10

What's your score?

80 or more: Congratulations! You have gone a long way toward mastering leadership skills. **Between 60 and 80:** It's time to fine tune your leadership practices. **Below 60:** Your skills could use a tune-up. Take action on the suggestions in the accompanying article.

"I had to go to [this employee] and say, 'This assignment was pretty insensitive of me. I didn't think about it from your perspective. Let's find something that you're comfortable with doing." Because this particular employee loved to read, Pulido says she started a club where employees would deposit books they had read. "She didn't have to stand in front of anyone and give a talk. We turned what had been a bad situation into a success."

Lesson learned? "It was two-fold," says Pulido. "The value of listening, and the importance of getting employee buy-in before acting."

FINDING LEADERS

Leadership skills can supercharge a law firm's performance. But where does a firm find those leaders? Many times, from within.

"Keep an eye out for people who come up with new ideas and new ways of doing things," says Bianca Riemer, Finance Director and Board Member at the International Coaching Federation. "Also look for those who have good relationships with other staff members and of whom others describe as supportive, creative and thinking outside the box."

While prospective leaders must be competent in their duties, sometimes obtaining the trust of their colleagues can be even more important. "The high achiever who is not trusted by their team might be performing well at the expense of others," says Riemer. "On the other hand, someone who might not be as high on the performance ladder might have very high leadership potential because they are getting the best out of everybody else."

Understanding the motivations of team members and helping them to peak performance is the common thread connecting all the characteristics of the great leader.

"Leadership is about the people," says Pulido. "Perhaps the clearest sign of a potential leader is the ability to bring others along in a program. That's the definition of leadership itself." ■

About the Author

Phillip M. Perry is an award-winning business journalist with over 20 years of experience under his belt. A three-time recipient of the American Bar Association's Edge Award for editorial achievement, Perry freelances out of his New York City office. His byline has appeared over 3,000 times in the nation's business press.

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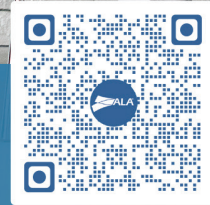
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Thinking Outside the Legal Box: Why Thinking Skills Are Critical Skills

HALEY REVEL
Talent Consulting Leader, Calibrate

We've all seen the industry headlines in 2023 that cite unavoidable workforce layoffs of lawyers and business professionals to cut costs and maintain firm market share. While economic forces remain a leading driver of layoffs, leaders should consider other ways to avoid taking drastic measures. Focus on the firm's biggest asset (talent) and their skills.

Leaders should embrace a solid talent strategy that frequently looks across all skills and competencies to enable a team with more agility during economic headwinds and to ensure continuity of client service delivery. But we aren't talking about just any skill — we are referencing the often-overlooked skills embedded in "thinking," specifically critical thinking, strategic thinking and problem-solving.

Perhaps more than any other business skill leaders should value, critical thinking can make the difference between success and failure. Every dollar an organization spends or receives is the direct result of a decision. **Critical thinking** is even more impactful when paired with a leadership focus. It helps an organization stay agile in often-changing competitive landscapes where emerging trends drive a response to take advantage or fall behind. Meanwhile **problem-solving** allows employees to engage in the psychological process of realizing, evaluating and resolving daily business challenges. With **strategic thinking** at play, employees and leaders become more skilled at anticipating, forecasting and capitalizing on opportunities.

Consider today's technological advancements with tools like Google, ChatGPT and Waze, where valuable information is readily available at anyone's fingertips without much effort. Gone are the days of having to research stacks to find answers, study and develop niche capabilities to be an expert, or to simply navigate one's physical location. Using critical thinking skills has shifted society from starting with a blank slate to instead understanding how to leverage resources to support a decision-making framework, deliverable or outcome.

As an individual, thinking strategically allows one to make a greater contribution in their role, become more essential to their organization and prove that they're ready to control greater resources.

In organizations with hierarchical management layers — combined with the minimized social interaction in a widely adopted hybrid workforce model — there has been a significant reduction in the practice of critical thinking skills. Strategic thinking is less of a skill learned through textbooks or training but rather one that is developed through exposure to senior leaders, their ideas and their ways of working. Without a leadership-driven, collaborative team approach that involves all levels in an organization interacting frequently, the necessary exposure to develop strategic thinking skills is not readily available to the most proficient employees — especially those with the potential to become leaders.

CRITICAL THINKING/PROBLEM SOLVING

Within every organization, some roles will be inherently transactional, focused on simple and repetitive tasks. These task-oriented roles do not require anything more than an employee completing an action and checking the box. In effectively led organizations, these skills are outsourced or automated so that thinking skills can be elevated and the talent (the people doing the work) can contribute more

strategically to business needs. The pace of change in society continues to quicken and technology progressively is becoming integrated with daily business operations. That means employees are expected to manage their role responsibilities with a heightened sense of understanding and ability to manage a complex flow of information.

However, it is increasingly evident that many are not proficient in managing this responsibility successfully because they lack the skills. Leaders must embrace this gap and provide opportunities to develop such skills. Good critical thinkers are more likely to suspend judgment early, which is important in the creative process. They embrace problem-solving strategies and can consider complications from multiple perspectives and understand the bigger picture by examining how different parts of a system (the business) interact with one another.

STRATEGIC THINKING

As we see more businesses elevate responsibility of their teams from simple business operators to strategic business partners, strategic thinking skills are critical to the individual and overall business success. As an individual, thinking strategically

allows one to make a greater contribution in their role, become more essential to their organization and prove that they're ready to control greater resources.

Strategic thinkers typically employ solid critical thinking skills to analyze and understand their current situations, then layer in strategic thinking to construct a path forward. When thinking strategically, a person will also use critical thinking to discern the likely outcomes of one planned action versus another.

In law firms — or any organization — employees and leaders with strategic thinking skills are more proficient at identifying opportunities for change and taking advantage of them. Doing so, in turn, increases agility, market share and profitability. That makes the organization more durable.

OVERCOMING THE GAP

Overcoming the thinking skills gap is not a hard challenge for leaders to tackle; developing talent is the best place to start. It requires an investment in analyzing and closing skills gaps, and — like any successful development program — it requires sponsorship from the top.

The good news is that obtaining buy-in from peer leaders should be an easy first step as improved problem-solving and critical thinking skills fundamentally lead to better business outcomes of increased profitability, performance and reduced operational costs. By offering everyone the opportunity to cultivate thinking skills to thrive in their roles, leaders will realize greater success for themselves, their teams and their organizations. It'll create a culture that embraces technology to elevate human ingenuity, reframes failure as an opportunity for learning, and breeds patience and grace as employees advance their ways of thinking. ■

About the Author

Haley Revel is Calibrate's talent consulting leader. With over 20 years in talent and human resources, she has a record of success in architecting, strategically delivering and leading global HR programs and operations embedded with technology driven solutions and aligned to key organizational priorities.

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Don't Reprimand, Understand: 5 Steps to Driving Change Through Positive Accountability

CRAIG GOODLIFFE
Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Cyberbacker

Practicing law is often stressful and intense, which can lead to tense moments for staff when things don't go according to plan. If an associate makes a poor decision at work, historically it's been considered "normal" for the managing partner to meet with them, hold them accountable for their mistake and give them a verbal dressing down. The truth, however, is that this approach simply does not work.

All too often in these situations, the staff member — in this example, the associate — leaves such meetings feeling misunderstood and resentful. As a result, their dedication to their jobs may suffer, along with their performance, and they may even start looking for a different job.

While it's important to hold employees accountable for their mistakes in order to avoid future problems, I have found that this can be done in a constructive manner through a set of techniques that enhance "positive accountability." Below, I explain what these are and how they work.

WHAT IS POSITIVE ACCOUNTABILITY?

In a recent *Forbes* article, Bryan Powell observes that the word "accountability" triggers fear throughout many workplaces. He asks: "What would it look like if everyone could view accountability as something they celebrated together so that the team could win together?" To develop a more positive mindset around accountability, he outlines a philosophy of positive accountability that emphasizes

> *Nobody likes to make mistakes, but they can be a powerful way to learn. By helping subordinates view poor decisions as opportunities, supervisors can ensure problems don't get repeated while simultaneously empowering the employees to develop professionally.*

collaboration and mutual support. Nowhere in his article does Powell suggest that lectures and reprimands lead to desirable results.

Essentially, the concept of positive accountability describes a workplace culture in which employees are safe to grow. Taking risks and making mistakes is an essential part of developing both as a professional and as a person, and these company cultures handle team members' poor decisions in such a way that supports their learning and avoids alienating them.

In my experience, organizational leaders and managers can shift their teams from toxic defensiveness to positive accountability by taking five simple steps.

Step 1: Keep empathy front-of-mind.
When employees make a poor decision, don't reprimand them — understand them. To truly understand an employee requires listening to their perspective and demonstrating empathy. If nothing else, supervisors can empathize with their subordinates over how uncomfortable it can feel when things go wrong. It may even be possible to empathize with

the employee about how uncomfortable it can feel to have conversations with one's supervisor such as these.

Listening with empathy is crucial because it helps the employee feel safe. When the team member is reassured that you are listening and can understand their point of view, they are less likely to become defensive. They also become more open to listening to you and understanding your point of view, which helps them accept the idea of changing their approach if necessary.

Step 2: Clearly identify any errors that were made.
In order to address the problem effectively, it's necessary to pinpoint exactly what went wrong and bring it to the involved employees' attention. As this part of the process can trigger defensiveness, strive to communicate openness and receptivity. For example, you might not have all the information yet — maybe you haven't reached any solid conclusions. Saying things to this effect can give the employees confidence that they will be treated fairly.

In addition, you may want to ask the employee to help you define the problem. During this part of the conversation,

get as specific and concrete as you can. Sidestep charged language and consider using passive voice in order to avoid pinning blame on any one person or group.

Step 3: During conversations, focus on "we" instead of "you."

Conversations that revolve around what "you" did and how "you" behaved tend to sound accusatory. "You" statements like these tend to make one's interlocutor feel blamed, and they may become defensive as a result. Once this happens, making peace becomes more difficult, and the conversation can easily degenerate into conflict.

Using the pronoun "we" instead may seem like a small change, but the effects can be big. When a supervisor says "we," they show they are still on the same team as the employee and that they are willing to take a portion of the blame onto themselves.

When used correctly, "we" also demonstrates that the employee can count on the supervisor's support. Using "let's" can have a similar effect. For example: "Let's take a closer look at those numbers to see where we went wrong."

As a word of caution, try to avoid the royal "we" or an ironic tone of voice, which tends to have the opposite effect on employees.

Step 4: Making mistakes provides a lesson in finding opportunities.

The key to this step is to adopt a growth mindset. Nobody likes to make mistakes, but they can be a powerful way to learn. By helping subordinates view poor decisions as opportunities, supervisors can ensure problems don't get repeated while simultaneously empowering the employees to develop professionally.

Step 5: Create plans to resolve the issue in the present as well as in the future.

Instead of getting bogged down rehashing what happened in the past, keep your conversations with struggling employees focused on the future. Explain the pathway they can take to secure future success.

If you can, it's best to present multiple solutions and allow the employees to choose the one they want to take. That way,

they will feel like their perspective is being included and take ownership of the solution themselves.

If that's not possible, consider asking the employee what they think the solution is. It might take them some time to figure this out, but if you are patient and help guide them through the necessary thought processes, they could come up with productive ideas themselves.

One way or another, paint a vivid picture of a positive outcome. This will increase their motivation to make any necessary changes.

HOLD YOURSELF ACCOUNTABLE

Each one of us makes mistakes. When helping employees through a bad decision at work, supervisors would be guilty of making mistakes of their own if they were to resort to lectures and reprimands.

If you find yourself in this situation, take a deep breath, go for a walk and master your own reaction before reaching out to the team members involved. Prepare yourself to handle the situation in a positive, constructive manner, and then follow the above steps. By holding yourself accountable in this way, you will be able to lead others by example.

We will not be able to control everything that happens around us. (It's an exercise of futility to try to do that, by the way. Trust me, I've tried!) But we can control how we respond to what happens around us.

I hope these insights help you reset your mindset and minimize your reactivity, so you can be more responsive and feel more empowered. ◼

About the Author

Craig Goodliffe is the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Cyberbacker, a provider of administrative support and virtual assistant services. An expert on business development, he shares his insight as a MAPS coach and helps clients earn seven-figure incomes.

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What Makes a Good Leader?

It's easy to identify bad leadership. We've all experienced it. But we want to know what makes a good leader — the type who motivates you to be your best self.

We wanted to know what qualities you believe make a good leader, or what's the best piece of leadership advice you've ever received?

We asked, and you answered! Here's what you had to say.

Leadership advice can come in many forms, including through observation as opposed to mere input from others. My law firm has always operated with great transparency, and I strive to replicate that quality in all aspects of my role. Transparency facilitates trust, which is the foundation of any successful organization.

A strong leader must be adaptable and able to quickly adjust for the nuances of each situation. The "my way or the highway" attitude is a nail in the coffin. Good employees want to be heard and also want to be a part of the solution. It's seldom the easiest path but [it] will definitely pay forward.

Nikki W. Bouis
Houston Chapter

During a leadership course, we engaged in a profound discussion about the influence of leadership within our organizations. One of our colleagues made a striking statement: "Leadership is not about elitism." This simple phrase had a profound impact on all of us. It reminded us that holding a leadership position does not elevate us above our team members. We realized our team consists of individuals just like us, and the only difference lies in our respective roles and responsibilities. True leadership starts with providing unwavering support to our team members, recognizing their value and fostering an environment where everyone can thrive.

Krystal Champlin-Gerage
RJH Consulting

[Leadership is] not the phrases or the words in a dictionary. In my mind, the definition of leadership is the faces of those I have had the pleasure to cross paths with. It is the face who told me when I was new at the firm, she had big plans for me. It is the smiling faces greeting me at my first ALA event. It is the determined faces of those who found themselves in the middle of the muck and continued their path. It is the faces of those who pushed me, encouraged me, challenged me, walked with me and nudged me. It is the faces of those who turned around and offered their hand so I could join their journey.

Leadership isn't large and grandiose. I cannot define it with words. I must see it; I have to feel it — I want to be it. If our paths have crossed, know that your face is in my definition of leader.

Debra L. Elsbury, CLM
Indiana Chapter

An Initialism on Leadership Qualities:

Listening to hear and understand others and critical issues.

Empathy allows for understanding others' perspectives and increases inclusivity.

Accessibility as a leader is essential to the performance and development of the team.

Dedicated commitment to service of others energizes hope and confidence.

Emotional Intelligence enables recognition and appropriate response to team and situational needs.

Respect for others creates positive and productive environments.

Self-awareness of strengths and weaknesses enables effectiveness and efficiency.

Heart-led leaders genuinely care for people, their well-being and their output.

Integrity is doing what is right and being a person the team trusts.

Practice enables continuous improvement and development of wisdom.

James L. Cornell, III
Capital Chapter

The most practical leadership advice I ever received was, "If you do it, then you will know." When presented with a new idea, lawyers love to consider everything that could possibly go wrong. That approach is necessary to a degree but can delay or derail implementation and prevent learning. I'd rather find out what can be accomplished than endlessly ponder the downside around a conference table.

What makes a good law firm leader? Strategic orientation. Big-picture thinking. Long-term view. Openness to ideas. Respected. Trusted. Constructive. Firm-first. Willing to discuss brutal facts. Understands the numbers. Is invested in the outcomes. Will put in the time. Available and accessible. Has a clear philosophy for winning and makes sure everybody knows what it is and is doing their part to carry it out.

Eric A. Seeger
Independent Member

I would say the ability to humanize yourself and lead from within is one quality of a good leader and is what I use to pattern my leadership skills and needs every day. If your team can see you as a real person and not a fixture of a management team, you have a shot at inspiring them to accomplish any team goal. No job is too small for me if there is a need. I will perform the same tasks asked of my team, when needed.

"Be the change you wish to see in the world" is my favorite quote. This can be used in leadership. I model the behavior I would like my team to exhibit. If I am helpful and willing to do whatever is needed, the same is expected from my team.

Cassandra G. Jackson
**New Jersey Chapter**

I believe a good leader is someone who can assess the situation and know when it is necessary to lead the team by example from the front, hang back and lead from behind empowering the team to grow in their own skill sets; or there are times when we need to come alongside the team and lead from the sides as support, arm-in-arm.

Jacqueline A. Johnson
Capital Chapter

The best piece of leadership advice I ever received was to not always have my foot on the gas pedal all the way down. For someone like me who wants to fix everything, now, this was an excellent reminder that people don't/can't always change as quickly as I would want. By modulating the rate of acceleration, you'll get where you want — maybe not as fast as you would prefer, but you will get there. Keeping your foot all the way down on the gas is a surefire recipe for frequent crash and burns.

In terms of what makes a good leader, my philosophy is to try to find the smartest people: It's OK if they're smarter than you. Then actively and routinely think about what challenges and motivates them. The idea is to surround yourself with the best people, and then keep them by ensuring that they are happy and engaged.

Ken Koehn, CLM, CPA, CMA
Chicago Chapter
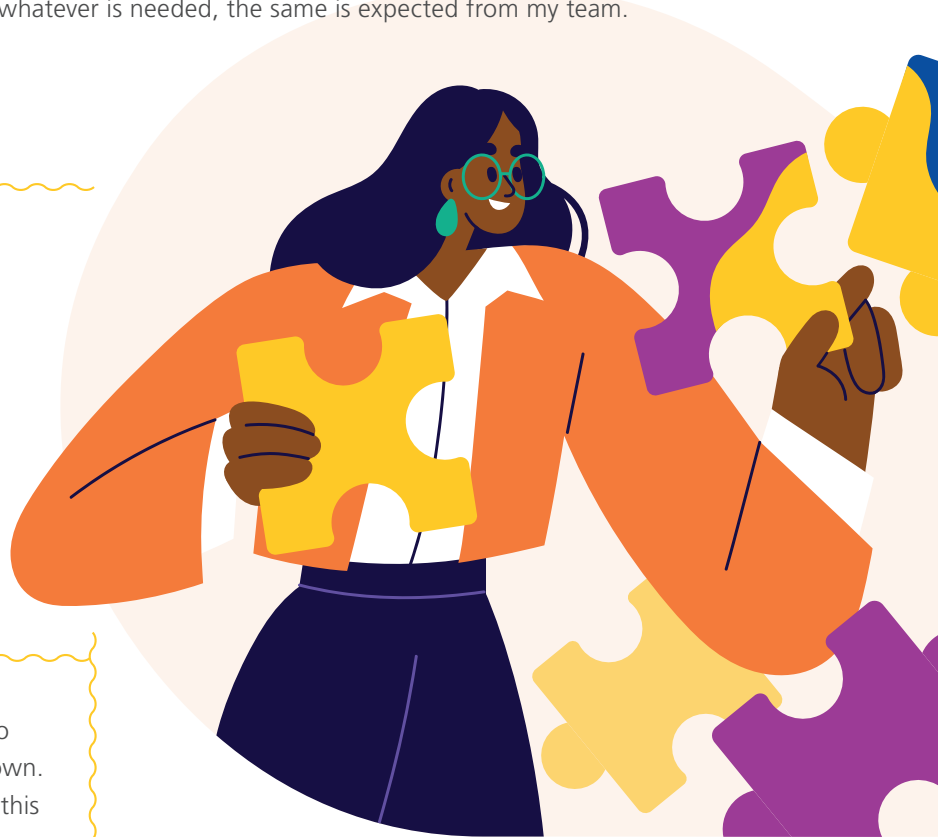
The best piece of leadership advice was given to me at the age of 8 as I was being tucked in by my mom. It was, "every minute that passes by is a minute you do not get back." Only recently do I understand what this means. Time is precious, yours and others. Give yourself time and give it to others but be wise in where and how you spend it — it is a limited resource.

What qualities make a good leader? Integrity, self-awareness, humility, authenticity, open-mindedness, empathy, respect and the gift of time are qualities that make a good leader. But, in the vein of Brené Brown: honest vulnerability — show me I am not alone, and I'll follow you into the dark.

Monique N. Mahler, CLM, MSLA, SHRM-CP
Houston Chapter

Titles don't create leaders. People follow those they trust. People follow those who display confidence. People follow those with a plan.

Be trustworthy, be confident, have a plan.

Stephen C. Wolf, CLM, CPA
New Orleans Chapter

When I was young, my boss once told me that the most important thing to look for in new employees is safety — meaning signs that they will act with honesty, integrity and diligence. To maintain this feeling, the boss must also make the employees feel safe by encouraging trust, autonomy and thinking out of the box. Listening and praising more, criticizing less. This way of being creates great employees and leaders alike.

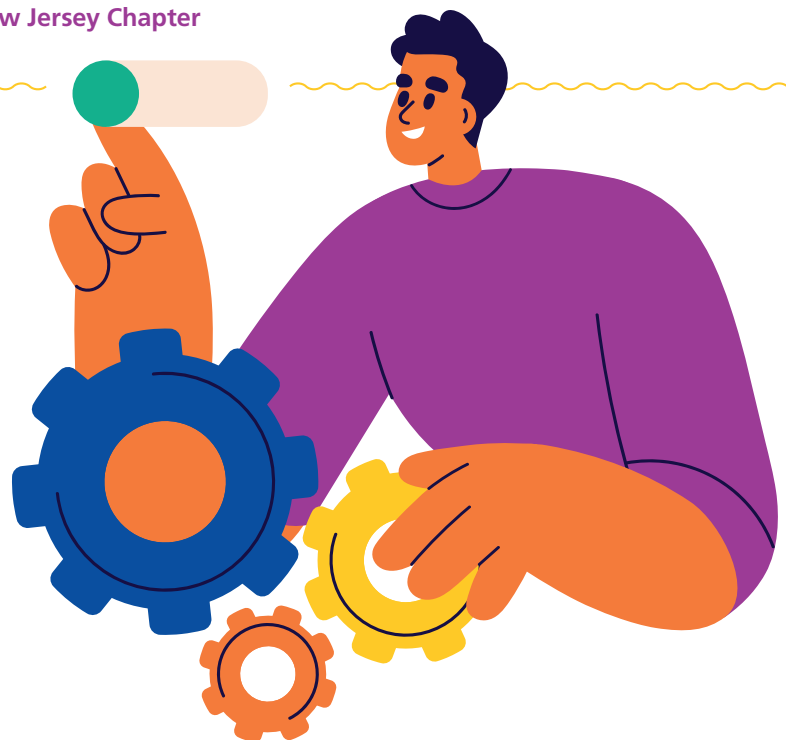**Dina A. Novikova**
New York City Chapter

A good leader…

- Assigns [themself] to some portion of in-the-weeds, tedious, low-level work on each engagement to ensure connection to line-level work.

- Assigns each team member to a "sphere of influence or expertise" for sense of authoritative contribution.

- "Inverts the pyramid," as in, removes obstacles from the line-level team member work, performs time reporting and administrative tasks, compiles dashboards, performs editing — instead of flowing these tasks down to the line-level team members.

Andrew Masini
New Jersey Chapter

A good leader is someone who is a great facilitator. These individuals carry a strong presence of mind, they stay grounded, listen deeply and guide through various obstacles and challenges. They are focused on staying vulnerable, cultivating trust, seeing the potential, aligning cultures, and supporting growth and opportunities through learning and knowledge advancement.

As Brené Brown has taught me, the best leaders dare to lead, inspire, show up, be courageous and take risks.
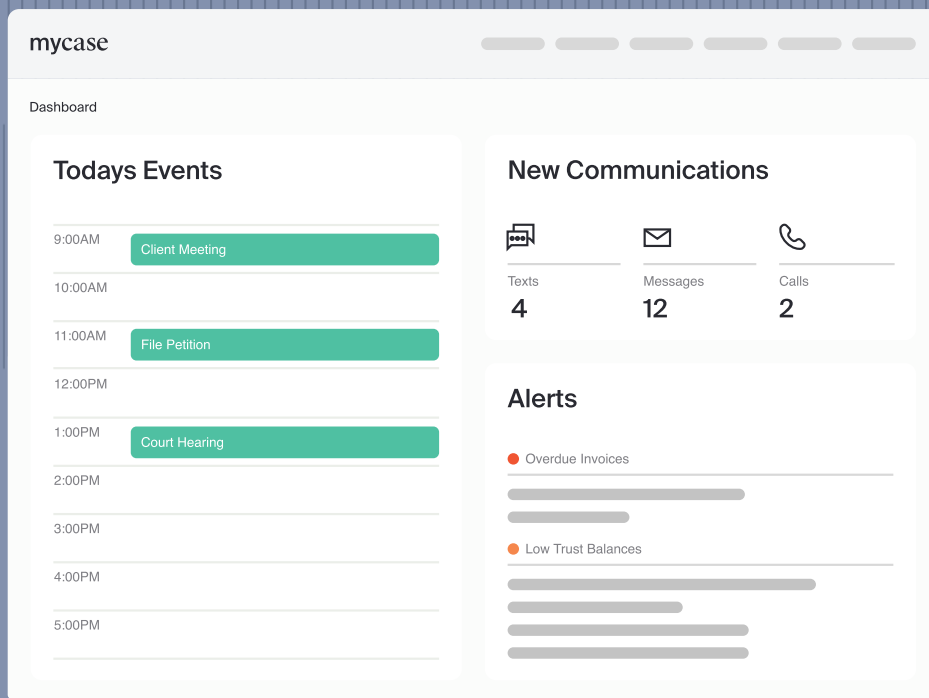
Amanda Teags, SHRM-CP
Puget Sound Chapter