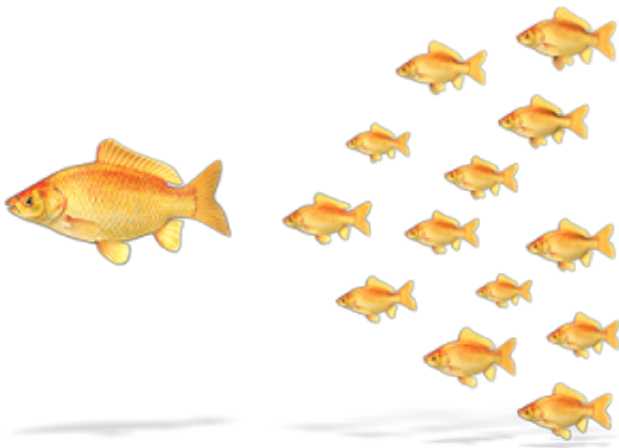


## Three things about special law firm leaders

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By Sean Larkan



With two upcoming talks on leadership development to deliver over the next few months to groups of lawyers, I thought it would be interesting to get some fresh ideas from one or two of my colleagues; Nick Jarrett-Kerr was kind enough to share his thoughts.

While Nick was quick to emphasise the mountain of books written each year on leadership, and that there is certainly no agreement around key attributes of successful leaders, having seen many leaders come and go for the past twenty years or so, he did feel three things stood out for him:

1. The ability of a leader to create what Nick termed a stunning “second album”;
2. Entrepreneurship; and
3. Trustability.

Let’s consider each of these attributes in a little more detail.

1. **The second album:** many new leaders come to the job for the first time with something of a mandate. They may have been elected or may have been selected by a committee or perhaps are the only ones prepared to do the job. In any event, they have usually set out what they want to achieve and the support behind them has provided a mandate to be able to deliver this. This alone enables them to achieve quite a lot in their first period in office.

In the music industry it is always said that the second album is much more difficult than the first. Something similar happens in law firms – the really good leaders have the ability to go on and create a really good second album after their first spell in office. Some less successful leaders seem to get stuck in the same old management-focused tasks and grooves they got involved with in the first period in office.

The best ones move forward and look for new opportunities and exploit those. The good second album sets the scene for the next thing Nick has seen in good leaders.

2. **Entrepreneurship** – that uncanny ability of some people, like good leaders, to identify and exploit previously untapped opportunities for their firms. A leader who’s been in office for a while should know his or her business inside out – every area of skill in every department, practice group or industry sector focus area, as well as every office. He or she should be intimately acquainted with the market in which the firm is practising and the competitive nature of that in regard to things like pricing differentials and so on. The ability, within this, to spot new opportunities and new and emerging

services and to exploit twists in existing services is one quality one sees in truly good leaders.

Or it may be the way to re-energise or re-position the firm in such a way as to better deal with its clients or possibly even the way in which it delivers its service. Equally entrepreneurial is the way in which a leader can help the firm to improve its processes, capture knowledge or create systems which provide unique ways of doing things. Good leaders can do some or all of these things.

3. **Trustability** – those leaders who do well seem to be able to engender trust amongst their partners. They have consistent standards and naturally demonstrate these, rather than just talking about them. Behaviourally, they control themselves in terms of the way in which they go about their business, and so set good examples. They in turn monitor these amongst fellow partners. They don't think short-term but rather, with a view to the longer term. They follow things through; they communicate well and don't sit in a bunker getting bogged down in administration. They are good at prioritising and are seen to make decisions properly. They also show a very intuitive and sympathetic approach to decision-making: while the really good leader may not operate entirely by consensus every decision is carefully looked at and carefully considered against consultation that has taken place. All this builds trust and what follows is respect.

When trust builds like this it grows a leader's confidence as well as the partners' confidence in the leader and the firm, which ultimately builds strength and well-being.

In a forthcoming article I will highlight some interesting points Ed Wesemann shared with me around what leadership attributes he feels will be required for the future.