

EDGE International Review

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STRATEGIC OPTIONS



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by Gerry Riskin

LEADERSHIP IN LAW FIRMS: EDGE WELCOMES MAGGIE CALLICRATE



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Managing Our Firm, ONE

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YOU ARE GREAT LAWYERS. IN ORDER TO BE SO, YOU MUST HAVE A NUMBER OF PROPENSITIES: TO BE FEROCIOUSLY INDEPENDENT, CRITICAL AND ANALYTICAL AND EVEN TENSE SOMETIMES. I WILL NOT ASK YOU TO GIVE UP THOSE PROPENSITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF YOUR SUBSTANTIVE PRACTICE.

Because we are now a firm of some size we need to capitalize upon the things we can achieve together that we cannot achieve alone. The rewards for doing so will be to gain competitive advantage. The punishment for not doing so will be to fade into mediocrity, perhaps even oblivion.

Therefore, the behavioral propensities you bring to your substantive work should continue but I am asking that you change your interactions with the firm in relation to its management. We cannot afford to debate every paper clip any longer.

If John F. Kennedy were a Managing Partner, he might have said, "Ask not what your firm can do for you but what you can do for your firm."

And as successful entrepreneur Larry

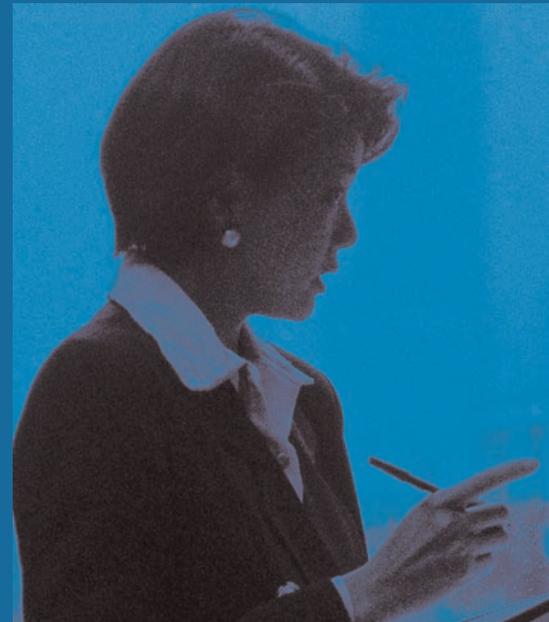
A PRESENTATION TO A FIRM

Anderson said, "Commitment does not require the absence of doubt; often commitment means acting despite your doubt." As a firm we want your commitment to the decisions we make, the strategy we adopt and the informal requests that we may make of you — whether you have doubts or not.

Robust disagreements are quite appropriate among those charged with making decisions, be they the partnership or board or executive. But in the execution phase, while constructive suggestions will be encouraged, disagreements and lack of support will no longer be tolerated... adherence to our values and decisions is essential for our ongoing success. We must insist on democracy over anarchy.

Allow me to assist in offering what I believe you could do to enhance your own satisfaction in the practice of law, enhance the satisfaction level of our clients, and contribute to the strength, viability and competitive resilience of our firm.

Become the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of your own professional and personal development — create a vision for the very best personal practice you can that fits with the firm's



overall strategic objectives. Balance your life by contributing some of your time to your health and family. Ponder these questions as a way to create your vision:

- What kind of work do I enjoy most?
- Which clients do I prefer serving?
- In what ways could I enhance the value of the work I like doing so that clients I prefer would get more

One Lawyer at a Time

ONE

BY ITS MANAGING PARTNER



value from us than our competitors?

- What am I learning (to enable me to do more a year from now than I can do today)?
- Consistent with my preferences for work and clients, what practice areas can I explore or develop that will enhance the firm's competitive position in the market place?

- Whom do I respect and admire outside the practice of law to recruit as my informal personal advisor; someone who would be a worthy mentor and who would have a different perspective than my law firm vantage point?

Become the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of your practice – keep an eye on your quantitative stats from hours to billings to receipts to receivables. If your personal discipline is not perfect, encourage the firm to exercise financial discipline for optimum performance and fully cooperate with firm initiatives. Consider these questions:

- What are my numbers like: billings relative to others in the firm and others in my practice area in the profession?
- Am I capturing all my effort by time recording (or robbing myself through lack of discipline)?
- Do I understand what alternate billing really means in light of the nature of clients I serve?
- Is my WIP being billed effectively

and quickly when analyzed by age and percent of billings?

- How do my write-downs and write-offs compare to others?
 - Am I asking for retainers where appropriate?
 - Am I influencing the early collection of receivables by picking up the phone when necessary and sending frequent reminders?
- You can get considerable help from the firm's CFO in this connection. Let the CFO know what your objectives are and ask for help generating supplementary data that will serve as your dashboard as you drive your practice.
- Become the Chief Information Officer (CIO) of your professional life – cooperate fully with the firm's efforts to incorporate technology for effectiveness and efficiency. Ask yourself:
- Am I staying current in my understanding of the spectrum of technological tools from basic word processing to document generation to knowledge management?

☉ **Am I exploring client access to data from databases to file status to deal rooms?**

☉ **Do I understand what the web can offer to enhance communications with clients?**

☉ **Am I encouraging members of my team to explore technology options?**

☉ **Do I encourage or require that my people take some time for technology training?**

The firm's real CIO can help – ask for a briefing on what our profession is doing in this area globally.

Become the V.P. of Marketing for your personal and group practice. Participate in training (either internally or externally) to learn how to project the effort you are already expending and the caring you already feel for the clients you serve. The greatest rewards will go to those who continually reinvent themselves and redefine how they will attract preferred work.

☉ **Do I effectively determine client needs by engaging existing and prospective clients in discussions on the topic?**

☉ **Similarly, do I explore how prospective clients choose attorneys?**

☉ **Do I explore what clients would like that no one is currently providing?**

☉ **Do I consider the lag time between aggressively marketing new clients and actually opening files and therefore begin the process even when my plate is full?**

☉ **Am I identifying those favored clients whom I would like to protect from competitors by investing a little extra time in enhancing their satisfaction levels and keeping them aware of**

the unique offerings that are not available from competitors?

☉ **Do I allow the marketing professional(s) within the firm to help me in creative ways or do I default to managing my marketing effort the same way I practice law: tolerating nothing less than perfection and discouraging experimentation?**

☉ **Do I care more about what my peers think about marketing options than whether they will be effective?**

☉ **Do I have a supply of thank you cards within arm's reach so that I can take a few seconds to create an expression of appreciation whenever appropriate (especially when I am the recipient of a referral)?**

Become the V.P. of Production for your personal and group practice. Spend some of your time thinking about ways to deliver unmatched legal work product both personally and as a team. Ask yourself:

☉ **Do I plan the creation of my work as well as my team's work?**

☉ **Does my team (including support staff) harmonize work schedules for optimum results?**

☉ **Do I apply time management principals (including saying "no") to avoid overworking (inefficiently) and under-producing?**

Become the V.P. of Human Resources (HR) for the people you encounter in the firm. Supervise and develop the personnel around you to peak performance, appreciate them whenever they give you the slightest reason, and speak about the firm with respect avoiding the temptation to complain or disagree in inappropriate forums. Ask yourself:

☉ **Do I take a bit of time to learn the work and client preferences of the members of my team?**

☉ **Do I find out what they aspire to and then coach them and follow up?**

☉ **Do I allow some training time for all of my team, including substantive, client relations, technology application and firm systems?**

☉ **Do I think of my people as a team so that I can identify gaps and holes to fill?**

Your senior management will take responsibility for training and deploying leaders of our practice groups and industry groups. We will coordinate and harmonize the firm. But our strength is in you — the individual — we need you to be operating at peak performance — we need you to be the best you can be. We want you to feel so appreciated and satisfied that you will want to spend your entire practicing lifetime right here with us.

Thank you.

[*Note to Reader: You might have hoped to find particulars here as to the identity of the managing partner and firm from whence this speech comes. Alas, the speech has never been given. I created this as an amalgam of what I believe the best managing partners I have observed would include in an address of this nature. It is offered to members of senior management of law firms as a catalyst for thought.*]



Gerry Riskin has

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