

BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL LAW FIRM

Most successful law firms, regardless of their size, share certain common characteristics which set them apart from the rest of the pack. The firm's mission statement, focus, team spirit, quality control and commitment to client satisfaction all impact on the bottom line. Attitudes and work ethic usually trickle down from the top – if the principals of the firm lead by example, the rest of the firm is likely to follow suit.

The personality or “culture” of a firm, unlike its mission, is not something that can be decided upon in advance by the principals – it inevitably develops of its own accord. A firm's culture is shaped and reshaped over time, defined by the personalities, values, backgrounds and skills of those who make up the firm and their relationships to each other. It manifests itself in the firm's standards, work ethic, communications and dealings with clients, interpersonal relationships, treatment of employees, rewards system and in the morale of the team.

However, the leaders can decide what kind of culture they want the firm to have, and endeavour to bring on board people with the right mix of qualities and skills to help to shape the firm culture in the desired form.

Developing a Mission Statement

Successful law firms must have a vision, and each lawyer should develop specialized expertise consistent with the firm's mission. A law firm with a specific focus knows what it is marketing, and can use its technology, personnel and value pricing more effectively and respond to changes in the marketplace more quickly than a general-practice or full-service firm.

It is essential that the principals determine a set of common goals and aspirations that all members of the firm can understand, embrace and strive for. There are certain factors that should be considered when determining the model towards which the firm will strive. These factors include areas of law practiced, size, ownership, physical and social environment, types of clients desired, management participation, organizational structure, geographic scope, community involvement, and economic results. A firm must be careful to devise a model that will help to meet its intended goals and objectives.

Striving for Excellence

The successful firm will endeavour to provide the highest quality work to all of its clients all of the time. This commitment to quality should extend to both the quality of the work itself, and the quality of the service provided. Clients expect and demand that their lawyers be sensitive to their needs and concerns, and want to feel that they are not only receiving valuable legal advice and services, but that they are being treated as valued and important customers of the firm. Judging the quality of service provided is often more difficult, especially from within the firm, as it is more subjective and requires the input of clients. Successful firms welcome and encourage feedback and performance evaluation from their clients as a means to help them gauge the level and quality of service that is being provided to their clients, from the receptionist through to the senior partners.

Being a Good Leader