

The first 100 days are the most critical in the tenure of practice group leaders because that is the “honeymoon” period when followers are most receptive to direction and change.

That’s what David Freeman of Whetstone Consulting contends, and he has coached thousands of professionals in law firms on what he calls “revenue-focused leadership.” Based on experience and research, he concludes that the first 100 days of leadership are “the ideal time to form good organizational habits [or] break habits that are not functional.”

Yet making an investment in leadership training is still unusual for law firms. “There is some real work to be done in this area [and] it doesn’t make sense for firms to spend a lot of money recruiting top talent without providing them with well-trained leaders,” says Freeman.

The First Steps

Understanding that there are different ways to lead and that various people respond differently to particular leadership styles is one of the first things leaders should learn, according to Freeman.

The most effective leaders are “hybrids” who can “look at the group and look at themselves” to decide what is needed for a particular situation, he says. The specific attributes of various styles – such as empathy, listening, standard setting, or providing forceful direction – are just different “tools” for achieving the objectives of leadership, contends Freeman.

But Freeman cautions that leadership is not just about “soft skills” either. Early in their tenure, leaders have to get people focused on goal-setting and the process of getting to their goals.

He says that leaders must build a plan and an organizational process for achieving the plan that fits with the people and the culture. He adds that corporate leaders understand that “you have to design and build the flywheel before you can actually get it moving.”

Seizing Opportunities

A key part of the successful flywheel is the formulation of a business development plan and strategy.

“It’s up to leaders to set the tone in every meeting that business development is a priority. It can’t be just something you talk about at the end of the meeting,” Freeman says, adding that cross-selling is a critical priority.

The veteran coach asserts that “almost every firm has a huge opportunity for improvement in cross-selling additional services to its clients.” In fact, Freeman facilitated discussions at one law firm retreat that identified roughly \$60 million in potential cross-selling opportunities.

Freeman also tells leaders to challenge their people to get closer to clients. “If a leader sends a clear message that you need to get ‘on site’ with clients a certain number of times per month that is a great start,” he advises.

He recalls one example where a New England lawyer experienced “the magic of being on site” with a client: “While he was there, three other people in the client’s office [other than the principal contact] stopped him [and] he walked out eight hours later with four more deals.”

It is ironic that some professionals think that clients don’t want the imposition of a visit, says Freeman. He points to the typical case of an in-house lawyer for a Fortune 20 company who was pleasantly surprised by a client visit and remarked that he was shocked that “absolutely nobody came to visit me before now.”

The follow-up component to business development is providing superior client service that leaves the client wanting more, and Freeman says there is a demonstrated history of what works in this area too.

“My framework is built on five aspects of exceptional client service, and if you nail these five things, you will deepen your client relationships with great service,” he asserts. The framework is designed to improve knowledge of the client business, enhance responsiveness, increase communication, provide proactive service and get the feedback that clients want to give.

Measuring Success

Freeman advises leaders to be patient in working through a program for revenue enhancement. “Dollars in the door is a lagging indicator of success,” he explains.



David Freeman

The “lead indicators” that should be measured are the specific activities that lead to revenue enhancement.

But he adds that revenue-focused leadership is not just about setting standards and measuring deliverables for activities directly linked to business development.

“Business people understand the importance of a ‘balanced scorecard’ that measures all the components to success,” he asserts. Such a scorecard puts financial success at the end of the formula, with measured steps for training and motivation, internal systems of operation and client focus getting high priorities.

Freeman uses a five-page checklist that helps his clients to break down all of the component parts of revenue-focused leadership, allowing them to focus on the component parts of success just one step at a time.



John Cunningham

Article by **John Cunningham** of Natick, MA, is currently a freelance writer/editor. Mr. Cunningham practiced law for 16 years, served as general counsel for a publicly held company and was a news editor for Lawyers Weekly publications for four years. He can be reached at (508) 653-9808 and c3cunningham@verizon.net.

The
LawMarketing
Portal

Where law firms learn to get more business.