

Effective firm leadership

A strategy

By business consultant Meryll Waters

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Law firm leadership is about more than just those at the top - it's about teamwork and a shared vision.

Meryll is an experienced law firm CEO and business consultant who knows the struggles and triumphs of leadership, and has developed effective strategies for the modern business.



Leadership is never easy, I absolutely understand that. I spent many years in my former life as a CEO assisting in the development of a regional firm into a national practice.

I am a great believer in amazing workplace cultures, and have turned my focus to helping businesses achieve this.

Let me share a few thoughts on leadership with you - Meryll

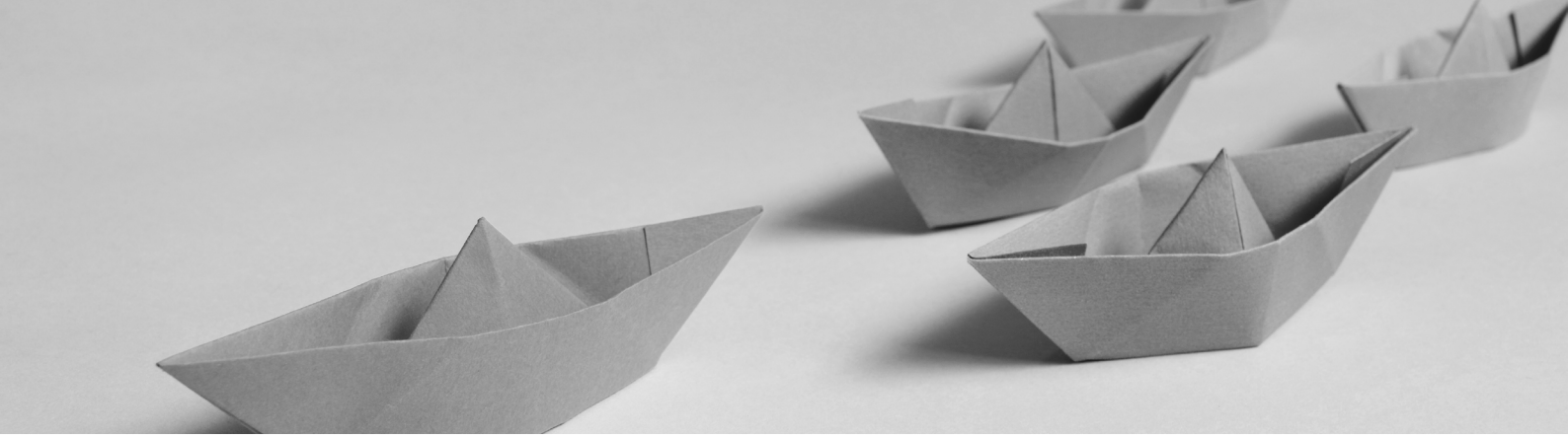
“ **The true test of leadership is the empowerment of people to drive for the success of the business.** ”

When we consider the concept of leaders and leadership in today's law firm, we generally look to the top - those that hold the position of Managing Director, Managing Partner or CEO.

While leadership qualities are a necessary trait for a successful person in those roles, the true test is the one mentioned before – do they empower those they work with? Of course overall vision, strategy and planning is a vital component of that success – but that's a discussion for another day.

There are many factors to consider when looking at leadership within law firms. In this article we're going to look at the role of the partner as a leader of people.





Whose responsibility is it to lead?

Every law firm partner has a responsibility to lead – it is not a responsibility that can be absolved and handed to the managing partner.

Of course a managing partner is someone who agrees to be identified as “the leader” for a firm and, depending on their prescribed role, may have a number of duties where strong leadership is required. These could include conflict resolution, meeting chair, internal and external spokesperson, peer support, remuneration and so on, however it is vitally important that every partner shows leadership in the business and most importantly: Leads with respect and sincerity.

This is not about management, it is about leadership.

*“Management is doing things right,
leadership is doing the right things.”*

- Peter Drucker, influential educator

Management v leadership

Most people can manage if that means delegating and supervising work, managing budgets and the like. Leadership is the key to turning those mechanics of the business into the success of the business. The impact of leadership at this tier is so often underestimated.

This kind of leadership is about behaviour, communication, attitude, and how you make people feel - if you have their back, they will have yours.

It's about you showing commitment to them and engagement in the work they undertake, and in response they will commit to you and your businesses' success. Your commitment can't be faked. It's a win/win situation but often either misunderstood or simply ignored – the old 'do as I say, not as I do' theory.

Of course it's foolish to think it's all going to be rosy and nice. Sometimes you will need to be demanding to drive performance for greater outcomes, but the key is to take the people along with you. Let them understand the direction, the magnitude of the task and the timelines. Involve them in the plan, use language that opens a two-way conversation and empowers them to deliver their piece of the puzzle.

If you are willing to commit to this level of leadership, you will be helping train leaders of the future.



Teamwork

Another vital aspect of the partner as leader, integral to your business success, is for partners to outwardly support the decisions and desires of the partnership. You cannot underestimate the damage that will be done by partners expressing alternative or differing views when discussing a business decision or strategy within earshot of your staff.

The time for alternative views is at the partnership table, when the decisions are being made. Once a decision is made and voted on, you have had your say. Regardless of which side of the score sheet you came in on, once the motion is passed, get yourself on board and make the best of it.

As partners you have an agreed decision making process and when you are seen to support this, the delivery mechanism of those decisions has immediate credibility. If you do otherwise, you undermine the integrity of the firm.

Leadership is not easy, otherwise everyone would already be great at it. There is always room to learn and the rewards to you and your business are well worth the effort.



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