

Law Practice Today January 2023

15 Tips For Leadership Success

[Stephen Seckler](#) and [David Rosenblatt](#)

Jan 05, 2023 ⌚ 5 min read



Marketing

Ethics

Business Development

Project Management

Practice Management

Solo & Small Firms

Summary

- ❑ Managing a group of lawyers is challenging. Successful lawyers are skeptical and good at anticipating risk.

[istockphoto.com/BlackJack3D](https://www.istockphoto.com/BlackJack3D)

You've just been named chair of your practice group. Your own practice is thriving, and you are excited about tackling some new challenges.

You've had a lot of experience running deals or managing litigation teams. You have a vision about what you would like to accomplish in your new leadership role.

Congratulations. You're in charge!

You've got this!

Or do you?

Maybe it is time to hone a new set of skills.

Managing a group of lawyers is challenging. Successful lawyers are skeptical and good at anticipating risk. They use their analytical abilities to solve problems for their clients. They know how to get things done. Lawyers have a heightened sense of urgency and like their autonomy.

If you are like a typical lawyer, you spend your days predicting what might go wrong and you approach client problems with a healthy dose of skepticism. You bring objectivity to your work and counsel your clients based on similar matters you have handled in the past.

While these qualities have enabled you to provide quality legal representation, being a good leader requires a different toolkit. Good leadership draws much more on your emotional intelligence.

What follows are some tips from a managing partner who has spent 24 years in the trenches and a lawyer who has coached attorneys on leadership, marketing, and career advancement for over two decades. Some of these tips may already resonate for you. But others may suggest that there are areas where you can grow.

Understand that there is a learning curve and that you are not expected to know everything from the start. Seek out help if you need it.

- 1 The Leader is Responsible for Everyone Else's Success.** According to leadership guru Simon Sinek, *leadership is not about being in charge. Leadership is about taking care of those in your charge.* In other words, your job now is to help everyone else be successful. A good leader is not concerned with showing that they are the smartest person in the room. They are concerned about the success of everyone else in the firm.
- 2 Active and Empathic Listening are Key.** Active listening means demonstrating that you understand what your partners, associates, paralegals,

and administrative staff are saying. Empathic listening is showing that you understand how they feel. Both empathic and active listening require undistracted focus, asking clarifying questions, paraphrasing what the other person is saying, and responding in a non-judgmental way.

- 3 **Elicit Feedback.** When important decisions need to be made in your firm, get feedback from those who will be impacted. If you want to create followers, make sure your key stakeholders have a chance to provide their input. They will be more invested in the decision.
- 4 **Communicate Regularly with Your Team.** People like to be kept informed. This is especially important during times of uncertainty. That doesn't mean that you will have all the answers; but it is important for everyone to know that you are working on the problem and that you will continue to provide updates as information becomes available. The pandemic highlighted this.
- 5 **Build Rapport.** The lawyers and staff you work with have lives outside of the firm. Take the time to learn more about them. What do their significant others do? Where do they like to go on vacation? Do they have hobbies, interests, children, etc.? Identify a few people to see in your firm or on your team each week to see how they are doing in their practices or just to learn more about what's going on in their lives.
- 6 **Make People Feel Appreciated.** You don't have to wait until someone has received a multimillion dollar verdict to acknowledge their contributions. One of the deepest needs we have as human being is to feel appreciated. That is an important part of your job now. Do it on a regular basis.
- 7 **Build Trust.** People will follow you if they trust that you have their best interests at heart and that your personal interests are secondary. That doesn't happen overnight. You have to work at it. Once you have that trust, people are more likely to give you the benefit of the doubt even if they disagree with your decisions.
- 8 **Give People Credit in Public.** It is great to make people feel appreciated in one on one situations. Giving people credit in a public forum is an even stronger way to make people feel engaged at work and connected to the firm. Take as little credit as possible for yourself. Be generous with praise for others.
- 9 **Delegate.** Now that you are in a leadership position (and presumably continuing to practice law as well), you are likely to be spread thin. Delegation

is critical. The test is not whether you could do something yourself or even whether you could do it better. The test is whether you are focusing on the things that are the best use of your time (i.e. the things that only you can do.) Delegating has the added benefit of giving another attorney or administrator the opportunity to learn something new and grow professionally. It also makes those individuals feel more vested in their own jobs.

- 10 Communicate News to the Firm or Your Group on a Regular Basis.** Creating a strong culture requires that your team is kept informed. David Rosenblatt sends out a short newsletter every 10 days or so to highlight new hires, attorney recognition, departures, or other important information about the firm. The newsletter contains nothing controversial (the test is whether there might be a problem if it were leaked to the press.)
- 11 Run Efficient and Productive Meetings.** While some information is best shared via a newsletter and some things are best discussed in private, there is a time and a place for meetings in law firms. It may be more efficient to gather the whole department or the entire partnership when trying to reach consensus on an important issue. Meetings also have a social component that can help build camaraderie. When you do hold meetings, be sure to send out an agenda beforehand and aim to keep meetings brief. David Rosenblatt tries to limit partner meetings to 45 minutes. Now that meetings are once again in person, his firm will also host a 45-minute reception beforehand.
- 12 Follow up on Commitments that Have Been Made.** Good practice group meetings end with clear action items and individuals who have been assigned responsibility for next steps. A good leader will follow up to make sure those tasks are completed.
- 13 Be a Cheerleader.** Don't underestimate the great value you can bring to your firm by being a cheerleader for your firm and the people in it, both internally and externally. To many, you are the "face" of the firm or the practice group. Conveying enthusiasm from your leadership perch will resonate well within and outside the firm.
- 14 Be Authentic.** Choose a leadership style that naturally suits you. There is more than one way to lead. Remember, you were chosen by partners who already respect you and appreciate your personal qualities. Don't be afraid to be yourself but understand that you may need to make some adjustments.
- 15 Be a Talent Scout.** The best leaders are always thinking about who they can

develop into the next generation of leaders (and what they need to get there). Scout outside your firm to fill in the holes in your roster. But make sure to be an internal talent scout as well.

Law firms are not the easiest businesses to manage. By training and makeup, lawyers are often competitive and value their independence. A good leader, however, can have a big impact on how that energy can be directed in a way that is most beneficial to the whole.

Just remember, it's not all about you anymore. Put another way *What Got You Here, Won't Get You There* (the title of Marshall Goldsmith's seminal book on executive coaching.)

Authors



Stephen Seckler

Stephen E. Seckler, Esq. is President of Seckler Attorney Coaching. He is an attorney with 25+ years of experience in coaching lawyers on marketing, career advancement, and leadership. He has helped 100's of attorney to...

[View Bio →](#)



David Rosenblatt

David P. Rosenblatt, Esq. (drosenblatt@burnslev.com) is a practicing attorney and the former managing partner of Burns & Levinson, LLP, a 125-attorney firm based in Boston. He was one of the longest-serving managing...

[View Bio →](#)

Committees

This content was produced by:

Lawyer Leadership & Management Committee →

Related Content

Marketing, Practice Management

The Lawyer as a Collaborative Leader

Jan 15, 2024

Finance, Marketing, Practice Management

Finance: Part One: Law Firm Mergers and Acquisitions: Bigger Always Better?

Dec 13, 2023

Finance, Marketing, Practice Management, Technology

LTRC Roundtable Discussion: Microsoft 365

Dec 06, 2023

Marketing, Practice Management

Leading With An Eye On Diversity

Jan 05, 2023

Finance, Marketing, Practice Management, Technology

Navigating Modern Communication Tools as a Lawyer

Jan 15, 2024

Marketing, Practice Management, Technology

Technology Will Only Matter to Lawyers When There Are Consequences for Failing to Use It

Jan 01, 2024

**Exclusive savings for ABA
Members members**

10% off Clio products



ABA American Bar Association |

/content/aba-cms-dotorg/en/groups/law_practice/resources/law-practice-today/2023-january/15-tips-for-leadership-success