

in focus

FMRC
LEGAL

Leaders need followers Tips for team performance

“Success in law firm management can be attributed partly to how well the leaders lead, but probably more importantly is how well their followers follow.”

Those people who make the most effective followers share a number of characteristics.

- 1. Self Management** - Followers have the ability to exercise control over their work and are comfortable operating without supervision.
- 2. Competence and Focus** - Followers master the skills that will benefit both their careers and the firm for which they work.
- 3. Values and Goals** - The values and goals of effective followers are aligned with those of the organisation. Satisfaction is gained from accomplishment.

Creating Effective Followers

These strategies can be implemented to improve the level of followership in your firm.

1. Role Definition
2. Training
3. Effective use of performance reviews
4. Organisational structure and culture

When it comes to maximising the performance of a legal firm, much of the focus is placed on leadership. This often involves enhancing the leadership skills of the existing leaders - partners and associates - as well as instilling leadership values in all other staff.

This emphasis on leadership has resulted in some losing sight of the people they are supposed to be leading. Success in law firm management can be attributed partly to how well the leaders lead, but probably more importantly is how well their followers follow.

Whether or not your firm has successful leadership and followership will be demonstrated in a number of ways.

It may be that you have a highly cohesive team whose members understand and enjoy the role they play in achieving the overall goals of the firm.



If people are enthused about their work, they constantly seek better ways of doing things and service their clients - whether internal or external - with their best efforts. This situation would indicate effective leadership and followership is in place.

If developing the quality of followers in your firm will be beneficial, the first task is to identify the desired characteristics of those in a follower role. The nature of legal practice is such that most people will very likely have a leadership role and follower role during different times of the day as well as at different points during their career.

Even when one has subordinates one still has bosses.

Characteristics of Effective Followers

Those people who make the most effective followers share a number of characteristics.

1. Self Management

Effective followers have the ability to exercise control over their work and are comfortable operating without supervision. They are confident they have the requisite knowledge and skill set to perform all tasks asked of them.

More importantly, effective followers understand their role in the team and how their actions benefit the organisation as a whole. They take an active interest in the overall well being of the team and do not focus on the hierarchy that may be in place.

This mature approach is justified by the knowledge that the achievement of team/firm goals will benefit them as individuals. The difficulty for some practitioners is that they can feel uncomfortable having self managing subordinates as the pressure to perform as a leader is a burden they would prefer to do without. Managing these leaders (your followers) is another challenge.

2. Competence and Focus

Effective followers master the skills that will benefit both their careers and the firm for which they work. This will involve attending courses and conferences relevant to their current and future roles with a view to make themselves a more effective member of the team.

High levels of competence also allow for these people to have responsibility delegated to them. They are able to identify potential problems and present formulated solutions for the consideration of the team and leaders.

Effective followers are aware of strategic issues as they relate to the firm and are a valuable resource in planning and growth.



3. Values and Goals

The values and goals of effective followers are aligned with those of the organisation.

Satisfaction is gained from accomplishment. Effective followers will be committed to achieving a particular goal.

These goals may be large or small, varying from successful outcomes in a litigation matter to completing all the word processing in the 'In' tray. It is not the size of the goal that is important, but the commitment to achieving it that sets people apart.

A high level of commitment can be contagious. Where others in the team share goals and values, these high levels of commitment inevitably build motivation and morale.

Creating Effective Followers

Creating effective followership can be difficult. In many firms, a leadership role such as associate or partner is the definition of success. Leadership skills are taught and encouraged while followership is not. This gives the impression that those in a follower's role are just along for the ride and the real difference is made by those at the top.

Practices wanting to perform at a higher level should espouse the notion that effective followership is essential for organisational success. These strategies can be implemented to improve the level of followership in your firm.

1. Role Definition

The distinguishing feature between followers and leaders is the role they play as opposed to their level of skill, intelligence or ability. Providing well publicised role definitions will contribute significantly to ensuring an 'us and them' mentality is avoided.

Often leaders in a firm are solicitors who have assumed a leadership role by virtue of their legal skills and seniority as opposed to their individual

leadership ability. In such a situation, a well defined role for the leader is essential. For example: if a leader's role is defined as being one to motivate others, the leader will likely react toward followers as if they need motivating.

A more effective role for the leader would be to:

- set firm goals and strategies
- monitor performance and timelines of the team
- achieve consensus among the team
- communicate enthusiasm

Similarly, the role definition of those in a follower's capacity would involve:

- having a thorough knowledge of how their actions contribute to the final outcome of a matter and the overall objectives of the firm
- having the capacity and desire to work as part of a team
- creating congruence between personal and corporate values and goals

Having defined these roles (note - these are not job descriptions), it is essential that they become part of the firm culture rather than just something to which you pay lip service. The importance of these roles can be conveyed to all in the firm through training and by example.

2. Training

There is an assumption that leadership has to be taught and that following is simply a matter of doing what you are told. Providing training to all members of your team will enhance overall performance. For those in a subordinate role, the most effective training that will improve their levels of followership are courses which increase their understanding of and motivation toward the firm's goals and objectives. Such courses may include:

- understandings of the operations of a legal practice
- goal alignment
- leadership and teamwork - the roles people play in them

3. Effective Use of Performance Reviews

Performance reviews can be used to emphasise the firm's commitment to team contribution and the role of followers. This can be achieved by applying the same evaluation criteria for leadership qualities to followership qualities.

For example, encourage performance in terms of self-management, technical knowledge, acceptance of responsibility and overall team/firm contribution.

4. Organisational Structure and Culture

The culture within the firm and the organisational structure will have a significant bearing on the effectiveness of people within your teams.

Practices that have an inclusive approach to all members report significantly higher levels of team and individual performance. Such a culture encourages people to push the boundaries of their ability. This in turn creates motivation to increase skills and accept greater responsibility.

Delegation is a significant way of encouraging the right sort of behaviour.

Have the courage to push work down to subordinates. Provide assistance where necessary and allow them to learn from the experience of others.

Similarly, the involvement of members of the team in strategic planning and goal setting for the firm will quickly build commitment and enthusiasm in those you require to be committed and enthused.

Associates – Building Skills for Partnership workshop

The one day intensive workshop to equip the next generation of your firm's leader with the skills now. Reap the reward early by having associates lead, manage and build a productive practice. Participants will focus on:

Maximising performance

- How associates in leading edge firms are staying ahead of the game
- The importance of profit
- Better approaches to tactical and strategic management
- Understanding the profit drivers in a legal practice
- Understanding cost of production, profit margins and price

Marketing and practice building

- Effective engagement management
- Measuring satisfaction levels
- Building and gaining client loyalty
- Managing and selling delegation
- Business promotion and profile building

Bringing out the best in your people

- Managing and motivating your team
- Defining excellence performance
- Reward systems that align with the firm's and personal goals
- Developing a vision and engaging others

Developing strategies and implementing change

- Assessing and understanding current performance levels
- Adopting a strategy appropriate to your firm that will maximise opportunity
- Making an impact in their firm

WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

Lawyers wanting to take the next step to partnership and those making their way to Associate level.

DATES & VENUES

Brisbane Thursday 17 April

Melbourne Monday 21 April

Sydney Thursday 24 April

9am to 5pm (coffee from 8:30am)

YOUR INVESTMENT

\$660 each or 3 for \$1650 people from your firm.

MCLE/CPD POINTS

6 MCLE points in NSW, 6 CPD points in Victoria

Subject to specific requirements of relevant State rulings.

VISIT US @ www.fmrcllegal.com

Workshop Co-ordinator FMRC Legal Pty Ltd
(ABN 80 083 010 075)
Level 2, 332 Kent Street, Sydney NSW 2000
telephone 02 9262 3377 facsimile 02 9262 6749
e-mail all@fmrcllegal.com



Presenter Sam Coupland

Sam is involved in all facets of practice management consulting, working with lawyers to grow and develop their practices.

Sam presents at all FMRC Legal programs and is the key presenter at the Law Society of New South Wales Practice Management

workshops. He has extensive experience with the issues facing firms of all sizes through his consulting activities and practice management workshops.

Prior to joining FMRC Legal, Sam was a member of the consulting division of a Big 4 accounting firm. His role was to find solutions to improve efficiency and productivity and oversee the implementation of change.

FMRC Legal - provides training, research and management advice to law firms. For the past 30 years it has been a major centre for training Australian and New Zealand solicitors in legal practice management. Today we act for major national law firms, mid-sized, boutique and progressive small firms.

Registration TAX INVOICE

Please register me in the following:

Brisbane: Thursday, 17 April

Melbourne: Monday, 21 April

Sydney: Thursday, 24 April

YOUR INVESTMENT

\$660 each or \$1650 for 3 people from your firm. (including GST).

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(Located on the back of your card, printed on the signature strip, provide last three digits)

TAX INVOICE

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