

Engage and Implement—Are they four letter words at your firm?

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You'll recall in the Fall 2007 issue of TOPICS, I discussed the 'wall' in the context of exchanging ideas. Here is another aspect of the lawyer 'wall': engagement and implementation. Have you come up against it when trying to implement new programs, policies or approaches? Have you ever had a plan that has been approved and then when you try to act upon it, it stalls?

You are not alone. Engaging lawyers and implementing new ideas, programs, policies or approaches is a challenge most law firm managers face. **Here are a few ways you can bring down the wall and start to get things done.**

Get your managing partner onside

In the ideal scenario, before starting any new initiative, you would ensure your managing partner is on side with your vision and that he/she agrees with your approach. Now, if you know for a fact this won't happen and still feel very strongly that this plan, policy or approach is imperative, then skip this step (for now), and come back to it once you have some proven results.

Start to engage by first getting to know your lawyers

This may seem obvious, however, from my experience the marketers and administrators I know that have been able to engage and implement new things within their firms know their lawyers – and they know them very well. So, get to know what they like and don't like, their strengths and their weaknesses, their career goals and what motivates them to reach those goals. It can take some time for the trust and bond between the two of you to grow, **so be patient, and it will pay off down the road.**

Identify 'early adopters'

Getting to know your lawyers better will help you identify early adopters. Choose people at various levels within the firm but know that most of the change will be led by people in the middle: senior associates and junior partners since they are more likely to embrace change. This first group should include current and soon-to-become practice group leaders. For reasons you will see later, it's important to build this momentum with lawyers who have influence and who are respected within the firm. **How will you know who they are?** They will be very driven in their careers and therefore will be very willing to take on new approaches to achieve their

goals. They will be willing to do things differently. And, in some cases, they may even be willing to not get compensated for it today. The important thing is that **they can see the future and are willing to get ahead of it.**

Ensure their success

Give them what they need to succeed. This may include outside consultants or coaches. Remember, these lawyers will be leading change and that is not easy. In many cases, they will be entering 'uncharted' territory. **It is imperative that they succeed to move your program to the next stage.**

Don't go it alone

Seek other like-minded management who are onside with your vision. Engage them in the process and look to them to help identify the appropriate people to pilot these new programs. If you are the only one leading this 'change' you are more likely to be thought of as a rebel or an outsider. **Create a team of people willing to support you; there is strength in numbers.**

Measure success

Have a system in place to measure success. Be able to answer: What has changed? How has this impacted the bottom line? How has this affected client retention? How has it affected your talent retention? Are more lawyers effectively engaged in business development? Are more practice group leaders owning accountability? You will need this information later. **If you don't already have an analytical software program in place, I highly recommend getting one.**

Articulate success

Results have a wonderful way of influencing change. Decide who needs to know what and when, and then articulate it. Be clear on what has been accomplished and how and why it makes sense.



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Express the measurements and how they affect the various outcomes you desire. **Regular and consistent communication about results will make or break your longer term vision.**

Conduct a second pilot

Building on the success of the first pilot, choose the next group of lawyers to work with. Go to another practice group or small group of individual lawyers. You are now looking for the next wave of early adopters -lawyers who will embrace changes now that they have seen others enjoy success. Follow the same steps as outlined above. Seek the support of the first group of lawyers to help identify and mentor this second group. They will be able to provide valuable advice and support. You will begin to notice 'organic' teams developing. **As like-minded lawyers begin to work with each other, they will be speaking the same language and following the same approaches.**

Get 'buy in' from firm management

You may have already included your managing partner at the onset of this program. If not – and you were waiting for results first - start with them now. Demonstrate the value of the program with the results you have already achieved. Get their buy-in. Then, have your managing partner present the program to the managing committee or whoever the decision makers are at your firm.

When all of this is established, you have a vision, a clear roadmap of how to get there, an army of generals on your side to champion the cause and RESULTS and PROOF! **It will be very difficult for them not to come onside especially knowing that there is a growing demand for this 'new way' rising within their firm as a result of the success you have already achieved.**

Articulate success firm wide

Now you are ready to articulate success to the entire firm. Success has been achieved and you will notice that behaviour is infectious. Once a number of your practice group leaders, junior partners and associates begin to behave differently - positively and with proven results - more lawyers within the firm will want to adopt a similar approach. **The 'buy-in' factor will greatly increase.**

Articulate the vision

In preparing to roll out the program or programs on a firm wide basis, it is imperative that everyone understands the value proposition here. It's time to share the 'vision' or the 'BIG PICTURE'. Design it so that every member of your team can see themselves in this new model. They understand what it will mean for their own practice and career. They will see the results and have

witnessed the change in behaviour among their peers. Champion the early adopters throughout your firm as examples of what are possible; they are your new role models. Some of them will even emerge as the next generation of leadership and not only support your vision for change - they will demand it. **Your 'early adopters' will lead the change efforts; you will not be alone.**

Implement your program

You have proven results. You have built your army, and you have your generals (practice group leaders) in place who will champion the cause. Now the firm at large will be far more prepared to accept change. You can roll out your program on a larger scale with the full confidence that from demonstrating success in incremental stages, and with continuous communication throughout the program, the results will be far greater than had you tried this from the beginning all on your own. **If not already in place, policy changes will be, a lot easier to make now that a greater number of your lawyers will have changed their behaviour.**

In conclusion, in most cases that I am aware of, policies or approaches that have been initiated on a large scale almost always fail. When you are talking about getting people to do things differently, it requires behavioural change. Behavioural change does not happen overnight. Think of it like a political campaign. Build the foundation by starting with a small group of people, pilot these new ideas and approaches with your early adopters. At this stage, don't make it a big deal; keep it under the radar until results have been proven. **Plant the seeds of change without upsetting the apple cart and look forward to harvest time.**

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