

Business & Careers

Getting ready for the upcoming wave of change

Unprepared firms are at risk of withering away



Gary Mitchell
The Coach

It's no secret that the workforce in general is aging. Law firms are not immune to these changing demographics with the "greying" of the bar. Today's legal marketplace is filled with firms populated by aging partners. Even though a great many of them are hanging on and working longer, at some point they will retire.

Is your firm looking at the ramifications of this? Whether large or small, regional or national, the current demographics of the workforce present some serious challenges.

The business case for succession planning involves five key areas: passing the torch with current client relationships, creating a BD culture, pruning where needed, recruitment, and leadership.

Current client relationships

You must be able to convince your senior partners to start "passing the torch" — by that, I mean including your younger lawyers to start building relationships with the clients. I see far too often where the senior partners are still "protecting" those clients. This does not serve your firm or the clients well. They must be shown the value of introducing the next generation of lawyers into the relationship.

Allowing your intermediate and junior lawyers the time to develop their own relationships with these institutional clients will create more loyalty and lessen the chance of these clients being poached when the senior partner retires. Bring them along to client meetings and lunches. Get them involved in the work and files. This gives your clients the opportunity to become comfortable and confident working with other lawyers. When the time comes to pass the torch, your clients are less likely to have an uneasy feeling about working with someone else at your firm.

Creating a business development culture

In today's legal marketplace with competition increasing every day, it's also imperative for your firm to get your next generation of lawyers up to speed with business development.

If they aren't willing to go out and get new work, where is it going to come from? If the senior partners are less active or non-active in this regard, who is going to generate the work? If your younger lawyers are unable to cultivate new relationships and bring in new business, how will your firm survive?

In many firms, however, the majority of lawyers are not interested or comfortable with business development. Where they are interested in strengthening their marketing and BD skills, firms are not willing to make an investment in them. You won't be able to help them all. So the first step in creating a BD culture is to identify those



SQUAREPIXELS / ISTOCKPHOTO.COM



Many people who are good at business development can also become good leaders. Then support them (via coaching, training, and mentoring) in becoming even more effective.

Gary Mitchell
On Trac Coach

lawyers who would be open to receiving support (training, coaching, mentoring), in their business development efforts.

Next, praise them when they achieve great results. Make them an example of what and where the firm is going. Feed on their competitive nature and reward them for their results. Give them everything they need to succeed.

Clear cut where needed

If you have lawyers who won't buy into this new way, then tough love is required. That will require your firm to take a hard look and determine which lawyers don't fit this new culture. You can't change them. They must be motivated on their own. If they are not willing to support your firm's business development efforts, then perhaps it's time to find them another home.

And I know that there are many lawyers out there who would love to step into their shoes. This millennial generation is different. They understand the importance of business development and the law firm. They want to be coached and mentored to improve their skills and develop new clients.

Recruitment

You must be relentless in your recruitment efforts. Having worked with all types, sizes and cultures of firms across Canada, I can tell you with certainty — there are lawyers out there who "get it."

Be clear on where the holes are before you begin your recruitment efforts. Iden-

view process. Ask direct questions like, What are you currently doing to attract more business? What associations do you belong to? How often are you networking in front of your target audience? Give us an example of how you brought in new business.

In this interview process, be sure to include a couple of partners who have proven to be successful in attracting new business. They will likely be of value weeding out the "fakers."

Leadership

From the work you do in supporting your lawyers in business development your next generation of leaders will self-identify. A lot of the same soft skills required to be effective in business development can also be used to lead. Many people who are good at business development can also become good leaders. Then support them (via coaching, training, and mentoring) in becoming even more effective.

These are just some of the areas to consider when creating your succession plan. All of these strategies are moot, however, if your management team isn't fully prepared for the journey. Some of these strategies will be tough. There will be some pain. But what's the alternative? Do nothing and just wither and die?

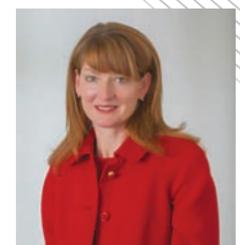
*Gary Mitchell is the principal at On Trac Coach, where he works with lawyers, law clerks and paralegals across Canada helping them to attract more clients and grow their businesses. He is co-founder of Legal A Team, a marketing and management alliance focused on providing Big Firm support to smaller law firms and solo practice lawyers, and his second book, *Raindance Two: A Blueprint for Growing your Practice*, is now available. He can be reached at gary@ontraccoach.com or 604-669-5235.*

ANNOUNCEMENTS

We associate with the best.

Carina De Pellegrin has joined our growing patent litigation team in the Ottawa office.

Carina has participated extensively in complex Canadian patent litigation and associated global litigation strategy, including many years litigating pharmaceutical-related patents and *Patented Medicines (Notice of Compliance) Regulations* proceedings. We are pleased to welcome Carina to Osler as we continually enhance the strength of our patent litigation team.



Osler, Hoskin & Harcourt LLP
Toronto Montréal Calgary Ottawa New York | osler.com

OSLER