

Tips From The Top

...From leaders in the Greater Fort Worth legal community.

Two Keys to Ensure Your Law Firm's Success

By Stephen L. Tatum

I've heard the act of law firm management described as a process of herding cats. What makes this an appropriate description is the typical independence that lawyers prefer in the pursuit of their profession. The practice of law appears to attract independent thinkers who do not like direction from anyone other than judges and clients.

While there are certain aspects of law firm management that do require good herding skills, I think the conventional wisdom isn't exactly correct.

Most lawyers I've come in contact with during my career have been very loyal, firm-oriented people who are as interested in the welfare of their fellow lawyers as they are their clients. Of course, the clients always come first, but usually the client's interest and the interest of the firm are very much aligned.

As long as lines of communication are open between management and members of the law firm, lawyers can be persuaded—as long as management takes positions that are reasonable and necessary—to meet whatever challenge arises.

The key, in my opinion, is to keep partners abreast of the big issues the firm faces. Once that's done, the problem solver in every lawyer's personality takes over and, in most cases, there is a great degree of agreement regarding how to meet whatever challenge arises.

Of course, there always are matters that need to be handled a bit more discreetly than at a firmwide meeting, but those types of matters tend not to generate a lot of disagreement.

The key is identifying, communicating and pursuing a common goal. If that's done successfully, the lawyers' inner

“team player” usually takes over.

The way to succeed in a law firm is simple. Achieve the results that your clients want in a profitable way. More importantly, or as importantly, success involves developing relationships with clients such that work can be performed by other members of the firm in the contact lawyer's absence.

Business development is key to every aspect of a law firm. The days in which institutional clients stayed with law firms for decades are, for the most part, gone. Young lawyers should be instructed about the methods and importance of business development from their very first day on the job because ultimately it's their success in that endeavor, coupled with their success in representing the clients that they develop or the clients that they are introduced to by other members of the firm, that will result in a successful career.

Other than success in helping to achieve a client's goals, the most important two things to ensure success in a law firm are the willingness to share and the ability to develop business. It's that simple.



Stephen L. Tatum has been practicing law in Fort Worth and in appellate courts across the state and Federal systems for 33 years. He has served as managing partner of Cantey Hanger LLP, one of Texas' oldest law firms, the past two years. He can be reached by emailing statum@canteyhanger.com.