



## Real Change

Forward-thinking firms provide plenty of tools and opportunities for professionals to find, create and sustain business relationships. These activities in themselves are useful. They can be tracked, measured, benchmarked and quantified. They are also often one-shot wonders. If I had a dollar for every time a partner has told me “Yeah, we did that once and it didn’t bring us anything”, I would be luxuriating on a beach in the South Pacific.

Perhaps we spend too much time looking at programs, policies, and procedures and not enough time looking at attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors that exist within our organizations. In my view, real and lasting change occurs only when people learn to *think and behave differently*.

Creating a business development culture in your firm is a useful example. After 18 years of working in this area, I’ve either tried or heard of every approach under the sun to get professionals to proactively develop their practices. Games and prizes, anyone? A seminar on client service, perhaps? How about leadership training? These things satisfy needs in the short term, but seldom lead to cultural change.

People become powerful business developers only when they alter their attitudes about it and behavior toward it. As the firm's leader, you can offer your professionals a new way of looking at things. You could help them see that:

- Ultimately their success is up to them, albeit with plenty of help from you and others in the firm along the way;

## Audacious Leadership

According to the thesaurus embedded in Word, “audacious” has several synonyms: brave, daring, bold, gutsy, spirited, and – my favorite – plucky. Interestingly, the antonym shown is “cowardly.” I guess the mid-point would be “mediocre.” Gives one pause, doesn’t it?

- Their professional lives are richer (both monetarily and intellectually) when they bring in good clients who provide interesting and profitable work;
- Relying on others to bring in business relegates them to grinding out work and not much more throughout their career;
- Landing good clients is its own thrill (not unlike, possibly, winning a case or auditing a complex organization).

As your firm’s leaders, you put considerable time, energy, and money into improving your firm. It is important to understand the need to dig deeper into the mind sets of the people you work with.

The actions surrounding real change are much tougher to drop into a spreadsheet, but the results are certainly real: confident, informed, loyal team members; a consistently full business development pipeline; low turnover; and people knocking on your door because they want to join your firm.

Before implementing your next program or policy, try this exercise: take the new perspectives discussed here and extrapolate them to your management, operations, finance, recruiting and retention efforts. Then figure out how you can communicate more effectively to give your employees new perspectives on what they do. Help them understand why this process is important and the successful results you foresee for them and for the firm.

By engaging in this level of thinking and communicating, you have the opportunity to initiate real and lasting change.

Most of the managing partners I know are terrific, very hard-working people who care deeply about what happens to their firms, both on their watch and down the road. But they’re not necessarily audacious. So what makes an audacious leader? A few thoughts:

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Effective communication tools.

Positive behavioral changes.

Real results to your bottom line.

## Finding Marketing's ROI

Now that marketing budgets are on the chopping block for many firms, my in-house marketing colleagues are challenged, once again, to justify their existence and to quantify their value. "Show me the ROI" is the rule of the day. This makes sense, of course, but return on investment data does not invent itself in your marketing department. It comes from every area of the firm and from places outside it. Here are three simple things you can implement right now to ensure you get the information you want.

First, a caveat: those of you who are reducing marketing budgets need to do so with care. It's one thing to trim fat, quite another to cut into bone. Strategic thinking is always helpful, particularly in times like these, because you can remain proactive rather than panicky. If your strategy is clear and everyone in the organization is on board with it, you can study and track what's working in marketing (and elsewhere) and what might need restructuring.

**1. Clarify your strategy.** If your strategy is either nonexistent or murky, your

marketing efforts almost certainly reflect that. Now is a good time to get very clear on your firm's identity, its place in the business community, and your goals going forward. Ask your marketing pro to collect historical and current data on where your firm's profits originate, how you got that work originally, and how you might expand on it. Ask her to survey your clients to find out why they stay with you and, of course, how you can improve. If you're very smart and brave, ask your marketer to meet with former clients and find out why they left. The information you receive from these efforts must play a critical role in formulating or reformulating your strategy. This is a far cry from what I see often, which is a strategy I call "What the Partners Will and Won't Do."

**2. Require your professionals to be disciplined in communicating data** to your marketer so it can be shared firm-wide. Your marketing information is only as good as the efforts your professionals expend to communicate internally. Effective marketing means tracking data and outcomes related to advertisements,

events, seminars, publicity, one-on-one meetings, and client surveys. It is almost always the professionals who will get follow-up contact, not your marketing person.

**3. Allow marketing professionals consistent access** to department, senior management, and board meetings. Firm meetings should rarely be secret or exclusive, and even then your marketers need to be clued in earlier than other team members, because they will likely have a hand in conveying your secret information. Marketers need to attend as many internal meetings as possible so they can both collect and communicate information. Emails from your marketer are of limited use, because they may go unread. The same is often true of your intranet. But five to ten minutes of face to face marketing time in meetings can get your marketer what he or she needs. It also sends a message to meeting participants that marketing remains an integral part of the firm's success, particularly in a down economy.

## Audacious Leadership (Continued from Page 1)

1. Audacious leaders **inspire**. They regularly communicate the organization's purpose to all employees. And the purpose always goes beyond profitability and billable time. They consistently create a sense of unity and an involvement in something that's bigger than any individual.

2. Audacious leaders **execute**. When they say they will do something, whether easy or difficult, they do it. In this age of too little accountability, an audacious leader's word really is his bond, and he doesn't let himself or anyone else off the hook.

3. Audacious leaders **confront** bad behavior. They deal head-on with partners and employees who, for whatever reason, make others' lives miserable. They are unafraid to ask "What the heck were you thinking?"

4. Audacious leaders **agitate**. They create and introduce bigger ideas and more ambitious plans for the firm than anyone else. And they bear the slings and arrows that go along with such ideas.

5. Audacious leaders **aspire**, thinking beyond the immediate problems. Audacious leaders ask for and get everyone's best

efforts, because they are respected and trusted – and because they are giving the best of themselves.

This is probably just the tip of the iceberg. If you are a leader in your organization, and you want to become more audacious, the key is to step out of your work-producing mode on occasion and give some thought to your own leadership style.

Gather a little data by asking those closest to you what they think about your leadership skills. Then ask a few others – those who are not your biggest fans – what they think. That will give you a fairly good snapshot of where you are now. From there, you can determine what needs to change, both between your ears and within your organization, to allow you to move closer to the audacious end of the leadership scale.