

New Managing Partner's Checklist

by Patrick J. McKenna

For any professional transitioning into the role of being the firm chair, managing partner or CEO, there are many new balls in the air. Anxiety can be high. Here is a broad checklist of things that you will likely want to reflect upon.

• Expansive Outlook

The first thing that becomes apparent to you when you assume the role of firm leader is that you are now looking at a larger landscape than before. What that means is:

- Demands on your time increase exponentially.
- Partners expect you to get up to speed quickly.
- Your sphere of influence is wider, broader, deeper.
- Performance is measured on bigger goals.
- Decisions often need to be made more quickly, and with less information.
- Agendas differ; conflicts surface more subtly.
- Internal politics play a more significant role.
- Your ability to develop relationships and exert influence are critical to achieving your goals.
- Strategies and plans can be easily derailed.

• Fresh Priorities

In this new landscape, what you choose to pay attention to determines both your potential success and personal satisfaction. To be a successful managing partner you must learn to:

- Be extraordinarily disciplined with your time.
- Stay focused on the big picture.
- Keep the members of your executive committee engaged.
- Notice the impact of your communication with others.
- Cultivate specific relationships with conscious intention.
- Acquire the skills to manage effectively through others.
- Endeavor to balance work and personal life.
- Accept that you can only control what you can control.

• Unique Challenges

Firm leadership responsibilities bring with them a variety of unique challenges. Some that you may face include:

- A change in your relationship with long-standing peers.
- Responsibility for functions in unfamiliar territory.
- A mandate to bring together diverse groups and work cultures.

- "Remote management" - leading offices or practices separated by geography.
- Metamorphosis from practice leader to leader of leaders: how to adapt, yet hold onto their creativity, independence and sense of urgency.

• **Tacit Fears**

While your new role can be exciting and rewarding, it is also common, for you as a new leader to allow your inner skeptic to emerge and to silently question yourself in areas like:

- Do I really have what it takes to lead this firm?
- Can I make my voice heard?
- Will I have the impact with my partners that I truly want?
- Am I exuding the right presence?
- Will I be able to meet my partners' expectations?
- How will I manage the competing demands of work and home?
- And, after years of success in the practice, "is this the position I'm going to fail at?"

• **Tips for New Leaders**

Some who have successfully navigated this journey offer these travel tips for leaders in transition:

- Think through who will be impacted by you in your new role and prepare for initial conversations with them.
- Seek out those who have made the transition to managing partner in other firms for guidance, advice on potential pitfalls, and encouragement.
- Take risks, manage uncertainty, appear calm.
- Learn how to get work done through others.
- Behave in ways you expect others to, i.e. "walk the talk."
- Know when to push back and learn how to do it effectively.
- Invest your energies in directions where you are being supported.
- Take advantage of developmental opportunities.
- Tackle difficult communication issues head-on with the support of a mentor or coach.
- Give constant verbal recognition. Reinforce people's actions and say "thank you" a lot.
- Find ways to relax and get some distance from the intense pressures of the job.
- Remember who you are - be yourself!
- Look back periodically to see what's been accomplished and inform your partner's of the firm's small successes.

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