

LAW PRACTICE FrontLINES

INTELLIGENCE, INSIGHTS & TACTICS FOR YOUR LAW PRACTICE

LAW FIRM STRATEGY MANEUVERING IN THE DOWNTURN

BY PATRICK J. McKENNA You have a working direction for the future of your practice. You've established clear-cut objectives and mapped out a road to reach them. Then the entire economic picture goes dark under the specter of a recession. Some can skate by when the economy is booming, but in tough times they really suffer. What do you do? It's time to figure out if, and how, you need to alter your firm's course. Here are some things you'll want to consider.

► **Obstacles.** What are the obstacles to continuing along your current path—foreseen and unforeseen? If it's unforeseen, some may ask, how are you going to see it? Use your imagination. Now, rank those obstacles in terms of likelihood and in terms of severity. As you identify the roadblocks, you might just discover a new approach to get where you want to go—and it might turn out to be better than what you are doing now.

► **Clients.** How are your clients' needs going to change? Their industries, their businesses, the color of their worlds will be affected by the downturn. What are you doing to understand their changing issues? Do your homework, track what's on the radar, get out of the office and talk to them. When pressure to stay competitive is at an all-time high, you must be absolutely certain your clients are getting what they need from you.

► **Talent.** Look for creative ways to hang on to top performers by making their lives easier. You can offer your people perks that don't cost a lot—perhaps flex-time or partial work-from-home schedules (much appreciated in these times of exorbitant gas prices). But it could be time to get rid of the underperformers. Underperformers can suck up a disproportionate amount of time, irritate clients, crush morale and drive away high performers.

► **Risk.** How much risk are you willing to take? As you think about ways to alter your course, you also need to think about how far you're prepared to go down any given road. What's too risky and what isn't to ensure the future of your practice? What would you do tomorrow if you could find additional resources? Figure out which objectives you can meet and which ones you should rethink, then develop your get-through-this-downturn plan. LP

Patrick J. McKenna (www.patrickmckenna.com) is a principal with Edge International, consults with law firms on competitive strategy, and can be reached at (780) 428-1052.

For more tips on thriving in a down economy, read Sara Kraeski's advice on the care and feeding of clients on page 10 and turn to the features, beginning on page 28.