

Must-do Tips No 73 - The Future Management Gap: Part 1

Last month, we focused on the perceived importance of *business development skills* for professional service firms of the future*. Alarming, another key finding in the same survey was that *management skills* come **second from bottom** in the list of important attributes for future leaders of the firm. In a world of increasing business complexity, this appears 100% counter-intuitive and must surely be a source of serious concern.

Why so? Well, clients are demanding a more "corporate" approach from their advisers. In our opinion, this desire for greater commercialism is creating a major and permanent shift in how professional firms need to operate (e.g. increased use of outsourcing leading to the need to manage 'virtual' teams); such changes will demand much MORE in the way of management and leadership ability. Progressive firms are recognising the trend and taking steps to address it via learning and development. Yet still - as evidenced in the survey - major negative perceptions of the management pursuit persist. In the absence of radical re-engineering of the partnership model, how to address the problem?

This month we offer three ideas to help overcome some of the barriers to management acceptance. In Part 2, we will focus on three of the main skill areas necessary for professionals to excel.

* 'Future Lawyers' survey by Legal Week in association with Badenoch & Clark, April 2010

Tip 1 – good mentors are vital

Time and again, we come across the same phenomenon. Excellent partners and senior people cite the influence of particular individuals who they worked for/with, who served as their 'model' of best practice by engendering in them attitudes and methodologies that they adopted and adapted successfully to their way of doing things. Sadly, we also come across examples of where the opposite applies and poor habits have become deeply ingrained in the same manner.

We believe that EVERY associate or manager should have real, live and active mentors with whom they can work closely throughout their career in the firm. These mentors may not be their 'line' manager, but they must be hand-picked for their professional excellence, influencing skills, and willingness to perform the mentoring role with developing professionals. A tall but vital order.

Tip 2 - competencies...develop/ use them properly

There are two points to make here. First, for those firms without them, an approach to staff development based upon firm and job-specific competencies (required observable behaviours that constitute success in a role) is a must. Such frameworks make the need for managerial and other non-technical aptitudes explicit. More and more firms are introducing such systems. Unfortunately, the ability to make them work to good effect is patchy. Here, good training backed up by a willingness to nail colours to the mast on the part of those involved at senior level in the appraisal and reward process have to be present. Otherwise, lip service becomes the order of the day...

Tip 3 - DOH! - educate the partners

As Homer Simpson might say, this is a no-brainer ain't it? Not quite so. There are an encouraging number of firms who do have comprehensive and thorough management training programmes - for associates and middle managers but NOT their partners or directors! Imagine nobody's surprise then that such skills are not rated by many of these senior professionals. As managers of the business, senior staff MUST have the necessary and ongoing education in how to work successfully with their teams and all other aspects of the people and resource management spectrum. This is one of the first major steps in addressing the challenge successfully.

You can also tap into help on how to survive the downturn via **Business Development in Recession**. This article series is available **free** to view and download at <http://www.peoplescope.com/articles.php>. And finally to access for free, we have a wide selection of previous issues of Must-do Tips offering practical, real world advice: just go to <http://www.peoplescope.com/must-do-tips.php>.

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Best regards.

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