

SciTech e-Merging News

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Want to make more rain? Be a better leader.

Leaders are better rainmakers. Bold statement, isn't it? But think about it. Would you easily place your trust in someone who manages a team of worker bees who don't make much individual contribution, even though you know the team would falter if the manager should leave? Or would you select someone who is skilled in assembling a strong team and evoking high performance from its members?

A leader is more likely to show up for a meeting with a client or prospective client ready to ask questions. Which is more impressive, someone who talks nonstop about the cases she's won and the professional accolades she's received, or someone who asks questions first to determine what's needed and then offers how her skill and experience would serve to meet those needs? Which behavior is more characteristic of a leader?

Clients generally hire lawyers, not firms, but clients count on the lawyers to assemble and run the teams necessary to get the business accomplished. A leader is more likely to walk into a meeting with a prospective client and, at the proper time, present not only his or her own professional experience, but also that of the team, complete with discussion of how the team as a whole would function to meet the client's needs. There's a difference between a team leader who counts on the skill and expertise of team members and a legal hotshot who regards the team as merely a supporting cast. Clients and potential clients (not to mention the team) will sense that difference.

Leaders have the emotional intelligence to establish strong relationships, even when something goes wrong. Unfortunately, despite our best efforts, legal matters don't always go the way they "should." Juries are notoriously unpredictable, case law changes, and unforeseeable events happen that derail strategies, no matter how carefully planned or executed. Leaders tend to have the integrity to take responsibility when appropriate, and they have the discernment to focus on how to make things as right as possible under the circumstances. By handling problems in this way, leaders tend to become trusted advisors rather than hired guns.

What part of your leadership development path is calling for focus so you can also improve your client service and business development skills? Perhaps it's your presence, since the way you hold yourself and the way you communicate both verbally and non-verbally can have a dramatic impact on how you're perceived. Perhaps it's your self-management in the areas of time or energy. Or perhaps you could be a more effective team leader, whether your team is the whole firm, a practice area team, a client matter team, or a project team. Make the time to improve your leadership skills, and you'll see client benefits as well.

The Section of Science and Technology Law offers unique opportunities for leadership development. Regardless of what skill you' like to improve, there's a path within the Section, and you'll get the added benefit of building relationships as well. Reach out to a committee chair and offer to lead a project – perhaps to coordinate a state-by-state review of law on a hot topic or arranging a brown bag luncheon teleconference to discuss the impact of a recent development. Roll up your sleeves and take on some work. You'll deepen your substantive knowledge and you'll grow your leadership capacity.

Julie A. Fleming, J.D. serves as the Secretary of the Section of Science and Technology Law. Julie provides attorney development consulting for an international clientele, is the author of The Reluctant Rainmaker: A Guide for Lawyers Who Hate Selling (Crow Creek Press, 2009), and is a frequent speaker for law firms and bar association on topics including business development, practice management, and leadership development. Prior to founding Life at the Bar LLC, Julie practiced law for over a decade in firms of 3 to more than 2100 attorneys, specializing in patent litigation. For more information, please visit www.LifeAtTheBar.com or call 800.758.6214.

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