

Lawyers As Managers: How To Be a Champion For Your Firm and Employees

A Book Review by Jordan Furlong

It's not adequate to call *Lawyers As Managers: How To Be a Champion For Your Firm and Employees*, merely "a book." What Andrew Elowitz and Marcia Watson Wasserman have authored here is nothing less than the definitive reference guide to managing people in a law firm.

Extraordinary changes in the legal services market, coupled with unprecedented pressures from both clients and competitors, mean that people management has become essential to the success of law firms of every size. But most lawyers thrust into management roles have received little training for the task and are made to feel that they have no aptitude for it.

The fundamental premise of *Lawyers As Managers*, however, is that great managers are made, not born. The book's corresponding promise is that it can help you achieve the status of "champion manager" — a lawyer who possesses the highest levels of people management skills, who champions the members of his or her firm, and who ends up managing his or her own team of champions. The authors make good on that promise throughout the book's 450 pages.

Lawyers As Managers is divided into four parts: relatively brief introductory and concluding sections at the start and end, and two powerhouse sections in the middle (along with a series of useful checklists in the appendix). Part I introduces lawyers to people management generally, and is most useful for lawyers who've never managed before and who need to learn the basics and value of good management. Part IV contains valuable closing advice on assessing and refining the management skills you've acquired on the previous chapters. But it's the two middle sections that truly set this work apart.

Part II, "The Champion Manager Toolkit," is a step-by-step guide to everything you need to know and do to become an outstanding manager. Highlights of the section are those areas where lawyers often struggle the most when managing people: delegating and assigning work (lawyers naturally assume they're the most qualified people for any job), giving and receiving feedback (always a touchy subject around hyper-sensitive lawyers), and managing conflicts (perhaps the part of the job most dreaded by lawyers — although, as the authors show, it doesn't have to be).

For myself, I was pleased to see an entire section on fostering collaboration and teamwork within the firm. Law firms are unusually prone to developing practice area "silos" that operate semi-independently, and they inadvertently encourage lawyers to turn their natural competitiveness against each other. The future of law firms, however, will be team-based and collaborative, and it's essential that lawyer-managers develop and manage positive group dynamics. The authors cover this topic well.

Part III, "Managing Specific Individuals and Situations," is the section that made me think in terms of a reference guide. Part II should be read and absorbed multiple times; Part III, however, can be dropped into and relied upon as required whenever the specific context of management needs arises. Among the many groups singled out for special attention here are millennials, under-performers, contract and "flex" attorneys, and home-based remote-working personnel. The advice in every case is sound and practical.

Included in Part III are topics to which firms need to pay much more attention than they have in the past. Diversity and inclusion, subjects that often receive little more than lip service in law firms, are important and require attentive management to achieve. Bullying is far too common in law firms, especially among those partners powerful and indispensable enough to practice it with impunity (you know the ones I mean). The authors devote several pages to managing bullying and harassment.

The breadth and depth of topics covered here are outstanding. But speaking personally, I was most impressed by the book's emphasis on addressing the often-indefinable but incredibly important subjects of culture, morale, and personal wellness. Too many books about law practice management focus solely on productivity and profitability, ignoring the human dimensions of a law firm and the human impact of working in a firm that doesn't really care whether its people are happy or not. Andrew and Marcia believe firms should care — primarily because it's the right thing to care about, but also because a happy, high-morale firm is almost always a more productive one as well.

If you have management responsibilities in a law firm, or if you one day hope to obtain a position in your firm that will require you to manage other people, then I strongly recommend you buy this book, read it closely, and internalize its advice and lessons. The authors have more than 45 years' of combined experience and expertise in law firms and the legal industry; they know whereof they speak. Take advantage of the wisdom they offer in this book, and use it to become a champion manager in your own law firm.

Jordan Furlong of Law21 is a consultant, author, and legal market analyst who forecasts the impact of changing market conditions on lawyers and law firms. He has addressed dozens of audiences in North America and worldwide on how best to adapt to a new legal world.

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A book review by Wendy Werner

"I have been working with lawyers and law firms for more than thirty years. This is a book I would recommend to any lawyer who supervises any lawyer, manages a law firm or department or aspires to be a lawyer-manager. The authors are knowledgeable, thorough and practical. They are both extremely experienced in working with lawyers and law firms. I do not believe there is a better or more thorough book available. I would recommend reading it and using it as a reference guide again and again."