

DOCTOR, DOCTOR

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I dread the healthcare process. Cumbersome, inconclusive, band-aids – these are often words out of my mouth as I talk with friends and family who have recent revelation of their experience with a doctor. I'm sure you have a story or two of your own challenges within the medical system.

And as I sat in the waiting room recently it occurred to me that some of the same short-term, quick-fix approaches apply to legal leaders, especially those where leadership is only one component of their responsibilities.

So, how do you diagnose a leadership problem? Here are three:

1. JUMPING TO A SOLUTION MEANS JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS

Are you the active sort? The kind that wants to see movement, to get past the problems that seem to surface over and over? If so, you might also be the person who looks so actively for a solution, that you overlook the cause. Have you found yourself saying, "If attorney X would just bill more of his/her time, we would have more cash and this wouldn't be a problem?"

Consider this a short-term solution, a band-aid if you will, for a cash flow problem that has other tentacles and sources feeding the problem. Leadership demands you patiently explore the issues underneath the symptom, so you aren't jumping to anything and the evaluation provides you a longer term solution. A conversation with this attorney about the goals and direction of the firm and the role timekeeping plays, including a few questions like, "what is your process for tracking time? How could your process be done more successfully?" will open the door to longer term success. This has the added benefit of snapping the costly instant swipes at solutions. One place to start: what is the long range plan for each practice area in your firm?

2. CREDIBILITY ISN'T A BIRTHRIGHT

Given the title of Managing Partner, Practice Group Leader, Chief Operating Officer, or Executive Director (to name a few) doesn't mean you are automatically trusted or people will follow your decisions. And, the title "Doctor" isn't the title for someone who can address all your medical maladies. Consider how trust is built: consistency, competency, and authenticity. Consistent

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communication throughout the firm, coupled with adherence to values and mission, and inclusive discussions of issues and concerns builds trust. That consistency requires competence both in the subjects being addressed, and the authenticity of self-awareness. Leaders look to develop solutions that solve for today and the future, and involve the people who are going to integrate the plan. Integration includes building collaboration among your peers, while also empowering the people who will execute the plan. This doesn't mean you must develop buy-in from every partner in the firm, it means your buy-in is developed with people who will then develop buy in from others.



When you focus on the implications of your decisions, the values your firm embodies, and the impact on people, process, and performance in your firm, trust is built. The importance of this cannot be understated. Once you have established trust, you have credibility; and then some forgiveness if you make mistakes. Without credibility, problematic and/or erroneous decisions cause your leadership to be in question.

3. COMMUNICATION IS MORE THAN TALKING

Have you been to the doctor and left wondering if they heard a single word you said? Without listening and talking, in that order, leadership comes in question. Sure, you may be the brightest and best decision maker in the firm, but if you turn around and no one is following you, you aren't leading. Decision making and leading aren't synonymous. Listening and incorporating the ideas of others into the strategic direction of the firm creates an environment where individuals and practice groups thrive. For those areas in your firm which have "sacred cows" or "elephants in the room", your leadership challenge is accountability, tough conversations, and potentially the cultural changes to incorporate accountability into this area.

Your ability to listen to others creates the environment to move the firm forward. Communication skills are complex and the most talented leaders continually grow and evolve their skills. In other words, communicating your vision, ideas, and plans is only the first half of the leadership equation. Building in the ideas and visions of your partners, your colleagues, and your team, is the fast path to success.

So, you've been to the doctor when you ask for something to reduce the infection and you leave with a pain killer? Or, maybe you've walked out scratching your head wondering if anything you said was heard? Turn those tables on yourself — are you listening to what your team has to offer you?

Leadership requires vision, credibility and communication skills. Start small — build your listening skills first. Look at the solution, both for today and for the future. And, use every opportunity to develop trust and rapport in your firm.

For more information and further reading on Communication & Conflict Management, visit our [online library](#).



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Judy understands teams. And she knows how to help you maximize the potential of yours. For over two decades, Judy has applied her vast knowledge of team dynamics, emotional intelligence, work/life balance, leadership, finance, and legal management to help law firms improve their people, process, performance and, ultimately, profits.

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