

Taking The Lead: What's Your Leadership Brand?

What do you want to achieve in your role, for your group and in your firm? What do you want to be known for? How will you make a difference, and how do you want people to remember your mark on the firm?

In 2007, Dave Ulrich and Norm Smallwood wrote a book titled *Leadership Brand: Developing Customer-Focused Leaders to Drive Performance and Build Lasting Value*, published by the Harvard Business School Press. I like to take ideas and concepts from the broader business world and find their applicability to law firm leadership, and there are certainly some ideas worth exploring in this book.



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President



Your brand as a leader is not something that just happens. You can do much to influence it. It needs to play to your strengths and it needs to align with where your firm is in its life cycle. Leading a firm in crisis is very different from being the ambassador for a stable firm that is embarking on growth. Leading a firm that has an appetite to reinvent itself and fundamentally change the way it delivers service to clients will need someone with the courage to break the industry norms and foster innovation. A stay-the-course leader may not be the right person for a firm that needs to change in order to succeed.

A change agent who loves change for change's sake isn't the right person for a firm that is reeling from a seismic shift in its ranks.

What do you want to accomplish?

Looking out at the next 12 to 18 months, what do you want to accomplish? Before you answer this question, think about it from a number of perspectives, including those of your firm (the entity), its clients, partners or shareholders and its employees.

Consider where the firm is in its life cycle and what it needs. Does it need a long-term strategist or a change agent? Does it need someone who can get the financial house in order and get things done? Does it need someone who has the courage to take things apart, break all the rules and champion something completely new? Are you one of those people—strategist, change agent, financial hawk or innovator—and is this the right time for you to take the lead?

What do you want to be known for?

At the end of your term, what do you want to be known for? Are you the leader who will finally deal with the thorny issues that previous leaders have avoided? What do you need to do to get the small wins necessary to earn the political capital to take on the big issues?

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Do you want to be known for having a compelling vision and making everyone pull together in the same direction to achieve this vision? Are you a consensus builder and collaborator who can engage people and make them feel they've had a hand in creating their future? Are you a trusted leader and strong communicator who has ramped up transparency and accountability? What do you want to be known for? The answer to this question should describe the need in the organization and your role in addressing that need.

Who are you and what can you deliver?

Who you are is about your character. What you can deliver is about your competence. The former can stay with you for a lifetime. The latter must evolve.

What you can deliver depends very much on the collective will of the partnership and your ability to influence change. In the corporate world leaders may be able to command and control, at least for a while. Corporations are more hierarchical. In professional services, you make progress through influence. Leading professionals can feel a whole lot like leading volunteers, and your ability to influence their motivations and actions is the biggest determining factor in what you can deliver as a leader.

Simple questions, not-so-simple answers

Think about the following issues:

- *Clarity of purpose.* Are you able to articulate what you do and why?
- *Clarity of values.* Are you uncompromising about what you stand for?
- *Clarity of vision.* Do you know where you are going and how to get there?
- *Clarity of leadership.* Can you inspire, engage and motivate people to follow?



Brand is not something you can own. Brand is about the experience partners, associates, clients and staff have when they interact with you. As a result of your behavior, do they feel valued, involved, respected and trusted?

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