

## What Do I Do Now?

### *A Guide To New And Old Managing Partners On Wisdom In The Top Slot*

**SERVING AT THE PLEASURES OF MY PARTNERS**, by Patrick J. McKenna and Brian K. Burke. West Publishing, 2011, 167 pp.

There is no library in the world, I think, large enough to contain all the books written about leadership – and how to do it. Even songs. And speeches and seminars and training courses. What more can be said?

Plenty. First, the elements that go into good leadership are so dynamic that no one prescription works for everybody. This is particularly true in professional services, where lawyers and accountants think of themselves as individuals. In a class by themselves. Or as is often said, managing lawyers is like herding cats. And it really is.

What makes it worse is that few lawyers – and accountants too – are trained in dealing with the contemporary management problems of today's legal profession. In corporations, managers usually come up through the ranks, learning at each step upwards. Managing partners are usually given the job by seniority, or client development skills, or even popularity. Too often, they're handed the key to the corner office ...and then ask themselves the question, "What do I do now?"

Fortunately, so many managing partners have turned to consultants like Patrick McKenna for help that he's become not just an expert, but an experienced and reliable authority. And with his co-author, Attorney Brian K. Burke, himself a firm managing partner of long standing, and with input from a full array of other managing partners,

they have assembled a splendid collection of questions asked by a vast array of both old and new law firm managing partners. They then supply full and rich answers.

New managing partners, obviously with history in the firms they've been chosen to lead, may think they know the managerial issues they now face. But, according to the authors, they so often don't. The context is different, as are the expectations. There is, say the authors, much to learn and little time to do it.

Instead of long "Thou shalt and shalt not ..." diatribes, what the authors have done is offer a compendium of problems they have been asked to solve, and the advice they have given. These are the burning questions facing both new and old managing partners. Thus, instead of generalized leadership statements, they delineate specific advice to help solve specific problems. A valuable approach.

For example, how do you follow in the footsteps of a managing partner who had been a successful leader for some 15 years? And what should the managing partner's compensation be? How do you handle baby boomers' retirement? How do you deal with a chronic complainer? How do you work with the team you've inherited? Should there be term limits? How do you build trust within the firm? How do you deal with partners with strong views.

These real and difficult questions are not readily responsive to academic answers. Nor do the authors respond with academic answers. They cover these questions and more with the sure hand of experience -- with solutions based on the extensive and pragmatic experience of both the authors and a great many contributing firm managing partners. No simple answers here.

The problems of managing partners, one easily discerns from the book, reside to a large degree on the unique combination of partnership and the legal and accounting profession. In a sense, the professional firm partnership structure may be an anachronism -- one that is dying hard. Law and accounting firms, after all, are not grocery stores. Nor does an MBA earned earlier help much in dealing with firm managerial problems -- particularly those that arise in new contexts. For practical reasons, such as the reality the professions deal with the life and death problems of

both individuals and both large and small enterprises, there must be, in both professions, a visible sense of reliability and integrity, predicated on bodies of law and regulation and precedents. No room for random or casual responses. This aura of probity and responsibility must be visible, consistent, and viable. Casual doesn't work. It is this structure that gives meaning to the difficulty of managing a law or accounting firm. Moreover, competition between firms is intense. No wonder that managing partners, old and new, many of whom may never have thought much about managing the firms they are about to captain, and then suddenly find themselves in position of controlling the lives and destinies and economic well being of others within the firm, find their elevation daunting.

But new managing partners, in both law and accounting firms, will find comfort and aid in this extraordinary book, written by extraordinary people. A valuable tool in the professional firm management arsenal.

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