

Making Oxygen

The value of urgency in creating strategy.

By Gerry Riskin

Your law firm's success in 2012 may require considerable ingenuity under extreme pressure just as it did from the crew of Apollo 13 for their safe return to Earth.

Apollo 13 was the third mission in the American Apollo space program intended to land on the Moon. The number 2 oxygen tank in the Service Module exploded en route to the Moon, approximately 200,000 miles (320,000 km) from Earth. The developing drama was shown on television and depicted in the Apollo 13 movie based on the mission.

If you saw the movie, you may recall that the head of Mission Control assembled a team in a conference room and requested that the materials available to the astronauts in the Service Module be brought to the room because they had but a few hours to learn how to make oxygen to save the astronauts' lives.

By contrast, when the senior leadership team in most law firms meets to explore strategy, there is no sense of urgency. Worse, after extraordinarily bright people come up with some amazing plans, in most firms they are doomed to atrophy due to a lack of execution.

As you consider 2012, I recommend that you:

- Take off the rose colored glasses... the apparent good economic news is at best an exercise in extreme optimism and at worst the willful concealment of the truth
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- Clients have tasted economic power in the lawyer/client relationship and they are not going to give it up. In fact, if you are not exploring legal process management (LPM) in harmony with some of your most important clients, your firm is headed for rough seas.
- Make your plans as if they were a matter of life and death because they very well may be. In today's perilous times, your firm's fate may be as precarious as that of the 3 astronauts when the oxygen tank exploded.

I confess that I have framed this in a slightly melodramatic way in order to be provocative. The serious lesson I ask you to take from this is that your plans need a

deadline and they must be executed as if life itself dependent upon them. That is why in Edge, we make no apology for being obsessed with action.

[Contact the Author, Gerry Riskin.](#)