

Survival Guidelines for Today's Chief Legal Executives

Remember the scene in the Indiana Jones movie where the bad guy shows up and goes through his dynamic scimitar-wielding routine, hissing and screaming, kicking, and flailing? With a look of bewildered exasperation, Jones simply draws a pistol and shoots him.

Somebody forgot to tell the bad guy that competitive response times have shortened and yesterday's tactics are obsolete.

What's the lesson for law firms facing today's fierce competition? Get better fast and get it right the first time.

Value-Based Imperatives

In the past, law firms have addressed business and client development by investing in traditional marketing programs to promote their firms. The difficulty has been in creating value from these investments when marketing is not directly linked to the needs of the clients and to actually generating revenue from these clients.

Law firms have been looking for the silver-bullet solution. They have missed the opportunity to grow their business because they've focused their marketing budgets on promoting the firm and not raising the level of client support. Are you investing in your clients? Have you put in place a client-focused team approach with the infrastructure to support it? Have you been integrating your people, processes, and technology with your top clients?

While law firm marketing has evolved from producing glossy firm brochures and press releases into more proactive client activities, most law firms continue to lag in integrating their marketing and client development into cohesive client service solutions that create long-term value.

Does your law firm make the mistake of treating marketing initiatives as an expense? Instead, marketing should be managed as an investment, not to maintain the status quo, but to improve the delivery of products and services. What's the return on investment in terms of the firm's actual service capacity and how does it compare to other similar or competing demands for resources?

In the midst of this vacuum, there are chief legal executives pushing their law firms ahead to evolve from internally focused organizational silos to an integrated approach for driving revenue growth and building client loyalty.

How well do you know your clients, their businesses, industries, and how they themselves create value? No

matter how much you believe that your firm is the best in the world, it will mean nothing unless your clients have solid reasons of their own for wanting to do business with you. Remember, clients buy for their own reasons and not for yours.

Start by building a client-focused infrastructure, a client-focused team built around the key clients that is faster to respond to their needs, faster to respond to the threat of competition, and faster to introduce innovative legal solutions.

Making It Happen

How do you link your people, processes, and technology into a client focused-team? How do you successfully implement?

First things first! Prioritize your initiatives around teams that include your clients, marketing staff, partners, and associates. Partner with marketing, communications, and technology consultants committed to helping you achieve real results. Remember, success is not about developing strategies but rather about execution.

Successful execution is based on these four rules: (1) you can't do everything at once; (2) some things are more important than others; (3) left alone, people will not come up with the same set of priorities; (4) without team alignment with your clients' priorities, the right things don't get done at the right time.

A close working relationship between your key clients and the firm's teams is critical. Client involvement will insure that the teams are defining goals, roles, responsibilities, and action plans that create mutual value. Begin a dialogue with your key clients, and listen, listen, listen!

Make sure that the teams have the training and a road map to get them to their destination. Do your teams know how to interview and not interrogate clients? Do they know how to acquire information and use that information to offer legal solutions and service options that differentiate your firm in the client's eyes?

Your teams should begin by learning more about their clients, gathering specific information about the client's strategic direction, goals, and obstacles. In collaboration, the marketing staff and outside consultants will work with the teams to develop the marketing tactics, internal and external communications, and the appropriate collaborative technology support necessary to deliver measurable results.

The following are four best practices to dramatically accelerate implementation of your integrated marketing efforts firmwide.

- Align your people, processes, and technology to support your client teams. Rapid and effective deployment of a new, integrated client-focused business development and marketing model requires a well-defined vision of how the firm's resources fit together to support client teams. Work with your marketing, communications, and technology consultants to graphically represent how the teams will work together with your key clients and what the value will be both for them and you. A graphic approach is essential, as that is really the best teaching tool to foster a consensual understanding of the team dynamic among all participants.
- Treat implementation as a collaborative process and not as a project. All initiatives should follow at least three stages: decision making, planning and implementation. Make your marketing staff, in collaboration with your team leaders and outside consultants, responsible for the entire process from start to finish.
- Establish clear team performance measurements and identify the key input and output requirements. Coaching is the key. Make sure your team leaders and members get the training they need to work together to achieve their goals.
- Effective leadership is active leadership. Make sure that your leadership demonstrates visible support and stays actively involved. If you don't provide constant support, you risk sending a signal that this is not one of your top priorities. Don't forget to reward and recognize success or failure and punish inaction.

Take a hard look at how you communicate as the "change leader." When implementing a large change initiative, there's no such thing as over-communication. Put together a cross-functional communications team and develop an internal and external communication model. Then use it!

The C Words

Leadership today is about teamwork and coaching. You *change* the way people think by changing how they act. *Culture*, the other C word, is not just about how people think, it's also about how they behave. In order to change the culture, we must first change how people do their work before they are able to alter the way they think about it.

Without an integrated model and the training and coaching needed to implement it, change becomes fragmented and ineffective. Embrace a model that allows your firm and your teams to take a close look at your firm's competitiveness. Inculcate a methodology that will allow the client teams to identify their strengths and weaknesses as well as the opportunities and possible threats to achieving their client development goals.

The legal profession is in the midst of dramatic change in response to today's volatile markets. Clients are much more sophisticated in how they purchase legal services. Competitive law firms in the 21st century must move to an integrated business development model that is designed around their clients and what they perceive as value. Your role, as a leader, is to drive the change for your firm. Are you ready?

-Michael Kerrs



Business development consultant Michael Kerrs has held leadership positions with Fortune 500 and emerging growth firms in high technology and professional services. He is now collaborating with the WJF Institute to implement business development team strategies that drive profitable revenue growth and build client loyalty.

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