



# Leadership and Change: The Law Firm of the Future

Often, leaders at law firms are determined based on their success as legal practitioners. However, what makes a successful legal practitioner might not necessarily be what makes a good leader, especially in terms of change and change management.

Leaders at law firms need to recognise that change as a thing in an organisation is a very difficult process that needs attention and knowledge. Change in an organisation fundamentally operates on emotion and not rationality. When driving change in an organisation, one is not dealing with a rational set of circumstances but with lots of emotion, different individuals, egos and talent. Change in law firms must be effected in individuals and not in products and this is very different. A leader must recognise that emotions impact people and cause them to react irrationally to rational change because change will not happen unless leaders address the emotional aspect of the change being implemented. Leaders need to train themselves or be trained in managing emotions in the law firm.

## Taking Action to Drive Change

Driving change is not about making policies or processes but rather about conscious actions to implement the change. There are two aspects to taking action to drive change, which leaders must understand. First, is putting programs and policies that allow flexibility and demonstrating a commitment to implementing those programs/policies. Secondly, the hard part of listening carefully to what the employees in the law firm are saying – leaders should not assume that they know what is bothering their employees/what the employees want. In dealing with women, junior lawyers or other teams within the law firm like the finance team, tech team, business team etc, leaders should not make assumptions but ask questions and listen carefully to everyone's view.

Part of a leader's job is to be curious about what is happening around them, about what junior lawyers and other staff are doing and thinking and creating an enabling environment within the law firm that allows for different individuals within the firm that have skills or ideas to be identified and given opportunities to act on their ideas.

## Adopting A Growth Mindset

Leaders and everyone else in the law firm must adopt a growth mindset as opposed to a fixed mindset: a fixed mindset is fixated on things they know and do well in while a growth mindset is happy to not know things and to try them and fail. The vast majority of lawyers have fixed mindsets and this in part is because of the training lawyers undergo which makes us believe that being right is the goal. However, while being right is good for providing legal services, it is a disaster for advancing change. Projects that have failed should not be used as a reason to not try something again but as a lesson – the more failures you have the better you

are doing in advancing change and innovation. A leader that advances change, is curious and not afraid to fail.

#### The Client of the Future

The pandemic has introduced a new normal and has changed the way businesses and law firms operate. Clients are under immense pressure to stay afloat and as such they require emotional and personal support over and above the legal support that we typically provide as lawyers. Many times, when clients approach law firms, not only are they under pressure to deal with the legal problem at hand, but they are also under immense emotional pressure that is associated with the problem. It is therefore important for lawyers to also take interest in the client's well-being; and once a client feels safe with you, they will always see you are their trusted advisor and friend. Effectively, questions relating to pricing or billing will fall into place as things will come secondary as the client perceives you as a trusted advisor and will stick with you.

There has been an exponential growth of technology within the legal space, particularly with the advent of mobile applications and artificial intelligence software programmes, which are been seen to replicate some of the roles and work that would ordinarily have been done by lawyers, for example, due diligence and contract review software. Rather than trying to compete with the various technology service providers, lawyers will need to identify ways in which it can tap into the various technology segments to advance its already existing service offerings.

Do you have questions or comments on how leadership can inspire change for the law firm of the future? Write to us [ALNCommunications@africalegalnetwork.com](mailto:ALNCommunications@africalegalnetwork.com)

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