FIRST 100 DAYS

Transitioning A New Managing Partner

Patrick J. McKenna

FIRST 100 DAYS

Transitioning A New Managing Partner

It may not be fair, but it's true: Your first few months as Managing Partner—the time when you are just starting to grasp the totality of your new job—may well turn out to be the most crucial in setting the stage for a tenure that hopefully should last for years.

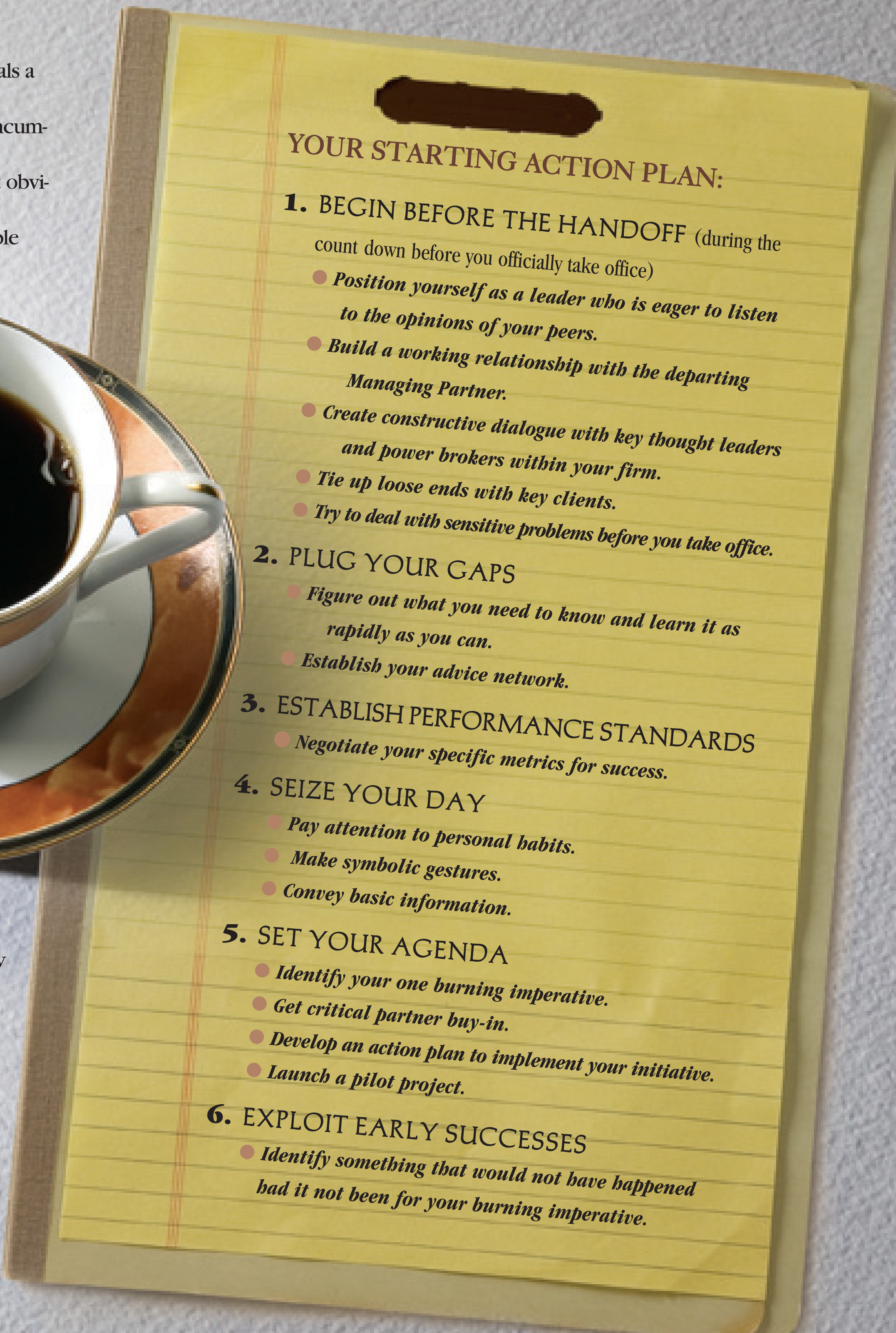
In spite of how well your peers might claim to know you, during those first few months, your formal decisions, informal behavior, and symbolic acts will be closely scrutinized. Everything you do and say will send messages, set tone, establish expectations, and communicate direction about what is of priority to you.

While these first 100 days represent a unique window of opportunity, they also hold the potential of your being easily misunderstood. How quickly you move may have your peers categorizing your management style as either rash, purposeful, or indecisive. Whom you consult with, on your first decisions, will feed the notion that you're inclusive, authoritarian, or even playing favorites. People may rush to label you as fair or arbitrary; a visionary or a cautious bureaucrat. Some may even be looking to test your authority.

Your initial decisions will shape perceptions of you that may last for years. In addition, the breakneck speed at which everything moves today will allow you little time to ease into your new role.

A new managing partner always signals a feeling that change is in the air. The incumbent is often eager to tackle the most obvious and fixable problems. And, a sizable percentage

of partners expect new firm leaders to make changes. So how can you, as a new leader, best take advantage of the change-friendly (if not change-demanding) climate? The findings of my ongoing managing partner surveys combined with my working knowledge of how leaders handle (and mishandle) their early days suggests the following action steps for tackling your new responsibilities:



YOUR STARTING ACTION PLAN:

1. BEGIN BEFORE THE HANDOFF (during the count down before you officially take office)
   - *Position yourself as a leader who is eager to listen to the opinions of your peers.*
   - *Build a working relationship with the departing Managing Partner.*
   - *Create constructive dialogue with key thought leaders and power brokers within your firm.*
   - *Tie up loose ends with key clients.*
   - *Try to deal with sensitive problems before you take office.*
2. PLUG YOUR GAPS
   - *Figure out what you need to know and learn it as rapidly as you can.*
   - *Establish your advice network.*
3. ESTABLISH PERFORMANCE STANDARDS
   - *Negotiate your specific metrics for success.*
4. SEIZE YOUR DAY
   - *Pay attention to personal habits.*
   - *Make symbolic gestures.*
   - *Convey basic information.*
5. SET YOUR AGENDA
   - *Identify your one burning imperative.*
   - *Get critical partner buy-in.*
   - *Develop an action plan to implement your initiative.*
   - *Launch a pilot project.*
6. EXPLOIT EARLY SUCCESSES
   - *Identify something that would not have happened had it not been for your burning imperative.*

It sounds trite, but the key to your success is to approach this crucial time in a systematic way.

"THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU NEED TO DO IN THREE PHASES:

GET WELL CONNECTED WITH THE VIEWS OF YOUR PEERS BEFORE THE OFFICIAL HANDOFF OCCURS;

BUILD YOUR PERSONAL CREDIBILITY WITHIN THE FIRST 30 DAYS;

AND THEN FOCUS YOUR ENERGY ON ACHIEVING SMALL SUCCESSES TOWARDS THE REALIZATION OF YOUR ONE BURNING IMPERATIVE IN THE FOLLOWING 60 DAYS."

BEGIN BEFORE THE HANDOFF

Before you consider what might be your highest priority in the first days of your new leadership position, you might want to think about the period leading up to your officially taking office, the stage I call the "countdown period." What can you do to improve your chances of hitting the ground running between being elected the new managing partner and finally taking the reins?

I believe your job begins the moment that you are confirmed as the new managing partner, irrespective of the fact that you make not officially take office for a number of weeks (or months). You need to use this time to schedule numerous meetings and consultations with key individuals as well as plan your first few weeks in office.

Position yourself as a leader who is eager to listen to the opinions of your peers.

Seek their guidance, and welcomes their advice and feedback. You will definitely want to meet with any partner who was also a candidate for your job to obtain their support and determine how you might utilize their continued involvement. Interestingly according to one new managing partner, "the answers that you get to any questions that you pose to your colleagues will be significantly different before you officially take office as compared to what you will hear after you become the new managing partner."

Build a working relationship with the departing Managing Partner.

Spend time listening, seeking your predecessor's input, and demonstrating that you appreciate his past achievements and the legacy that he is handing off to you. In many cases your predecessor will remain active in the firm, returning to their practice, perhaps even continuing to sit on the Executive Committee.

Meanwhile, you may want to cancel some initiative that this individual worked hard to put into place or alter a strategic direction that this leader championed. It can all make for a rather awkward and potential conflict of egos. Yet most departing leaders care deeply about the firm and are willing to help their successor, even when that successor in convinced that a new direction is needed. The departing leaders knowledge, insight, ability to anticipate problems and their internal contacts (favors owed them by other power partners) can be invaluable. All they need is for you to appreciate their past efforts, show some empathy for what they may be going through emotionally as they retire from their leadership office, and ask for their help.

Create constructive dialogue with key thought leaders and power brokers within your firm.

Many of these individuals may be members of your firm's Executive Committee. You need to meet one-on one with every member especially those who are your most influential or critical peers and those who may have a direct opinion and impact on your ultimate success.

My experience confirms that you also need to identify the "board within the board"- that faction of partners on the Executive Committee that wield disproportionate power.

Prior to your being elected managing partner, if you have not served on the Executive Committee, been a practice group leader or interacted regularly with the firm's management, your investing time to understand the internal power politics must begin before you officially assume office.

ASK EACH:

- *What are the festering problems that this firm has just not been able to deal with to your satisfaction?*
- *What are the most promising and unexploited opportunities to improve profitability and enhance firm growth?*
- *Where would you focus your attention if you were me?*
- *Who has the most promising leadership potential in your practice area?*

Tie up loose ends with key clients.

You will want to meet with your most important clients to explain in-person the transition you are making with your responsibilities and how it could likely affect the manner in which you will interact with this client in the future.

Try to deal with sensitive problems before you take office.

There may be those occasions where you will be faced with either needing to remove an incompetent individual (administrator or practice leader) soon after assuming your new position, or having to wait a respectable time before taking remedial action. An overlooked alternative is to have the Executive Committee or departing managing partner make the necessary changes in advance of your first day. In one case the exiting managing partner convinced a couple of dysfunctional practice group leaders that she and they should retire their leadership positions together in order to allow for new blood to flow freely through the firm.

PLUG YOUR GAPS

Figure out what you need to know and learn it as rapidly as you can.

Several managing partners have reported that they wish they would have had a chance or made the time to acquire some important skills or know-how that would have made their new lives easier. The period before you officially take on the new job may be ideal to assess and compensate for any identified shortcomings. One managing partner told me that not fully understanding accounting was his mental block file. "I wish I had spent a couple of days away at a course learning how to interpret the intricacies of monthly financial statements."

Consider that there may be a wide range of methods available to you to address any shortcomings. You could take a crash course in a particular skill area; meet privately with an external industry executive or technical advisor; hire a personal coach or consultant; or get mentored by the former managing partner or current executive director. Whichever route you choose, you must carefully assess whether your past experiences and skills have prepared you or whether there are some gaps that you should address before actually starting the job.

Establish your advice network.

Those who have an interest in your success can provide vital feedback and counsel. And, if you have internal trusted advisors who enjoy credibility within the firm, they can be influential in serving as a sounding board, guiding your actions, supporting your positions, and encouraging compliance to implement your agenda.

In a few instances (far too few I believe) a managing partner has been known to look outside the firm, to obtain both impartial and experienced counsel, from accomplished business leaders who have often experienced similar challenges and have a feel for what works and what may not. (See my article: The Logic For Having An Advisory Board)

ESTABLISH PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

You will want to determine with the Executive Committee as a group, their perceptions of the firm's current situation and what they think your priorities as a new managing partner should be. You want to define the specifics for how they expect to make decisions; how they prefer to receive information (e-mail, voice-mail, in-person, or some other mode); and the frequency with which they would wish to receive progress reports. Your primary focus should be directed toward listening, probing to obtain a deeper understanding and not offering any opinions.

KEY QUESTIONS OF YOUR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:

- ***What are the specific objectives, initiatives and goals you are tasking me with?***
  (Develop a crystal-clear understanding of their expectations. You must know exactly what their expectations are! And if they are conflicting, you should address the matter by having the Executive Committee put your objectives in writing.)

- ***Tell me how you would define in one year, three years and in five, whether or not I have been successful from your perspective?***
  (What will constitute success – identify, understand and negotiate how your performance will be measured.)

- ***What are the must-do's and what is my level of authority?***
  (What are your boundaries and limits before having to turn to the Executive Committee for approval? When do they want to be contacted, and on what kinds of issues, problems and decisions?)

- ***What will facilitate a very positive and constructive working relationship? What will impede such a relationship? What will really frustrate you as Executive Committee members, and how can we avoid that from occurring?***

Negotiate your specific metrics for success.

It is vitally important to identify and agree upon what you and your Executive Committee perceive as the new managing partner's mandate and what the new managing partner must do to be successful. These specific metrics will serve to help you formulate your short-term burning issue and longer term management priorities.

SEIZE YOUR DAY

On day one provide an outline of what people might expect and promise only what you are fairly sure you can deliver. One managing partner confided that projecting confidence without necessarily making promises was his hardest challenge on the first day.

Pay attention to personal habits.

Imagine yourself projected on a 50-foot screen by a video camera. Every move you make as firm leader will be subject to discussion and interpretation. That includes how early you arrive at the office, how you relate to people in the hallway, how you allocate your time, and how thoroughly you prepare for your first meetings.

In those instances where circumstances demand that the new leader take quick decisive action, scheduling some kind of forum where people can all hear what that you have to say, at the same time, goes a long way toward clarifying communication and squelching unproductive rumors.

Within days of his appointment at Anderson Consulting, the new CEO held a partners' meeting in which he and several members of the Executive Committee took questions from their colleagues, broadcast via satellite to 39 locations around the world. This monumental effort gave everyone access to the new CEO all at the same time and created excitement about his new appointment.

Make symbolic gestures.

One managing partner, in acknowledging the accomplishments of her predecessor with respect to growing the international side of the firm, announced that she wanted to schedule the next annual partner's meeting in London to signal the continuing importance to the firm's growth of building overseas markets.

On his first day as president and CEO of Burson-Marsteller Worldwide, Chris Komisarjevsky went to the basement of worldwide headquarters in New York City and shook the hand of each employee until he reached the executive floor-13 floors above.

Convey basic information.

It may be too early for specific details about your plans, but you should convey the basic values that will serve as your framework for making future decisions. This is a good time to identify one or two aspects of the firm culture that you want to preserve as sacred. Answer questions honestly. This is also the time to be clear about your management style. Doing so will save everyone from wasting valuable energy trying to figure out how to best work with you in your new position.

"IT HAS OFTEN BEEN SAID THAT AS A NEW LEADER, YOU WILL GET A SHORT HONEYMOON PERIOD IN WHICH TO DETERMINE YOUR DIRECTION –

IN OTHER WORDS, NO ONE EXPECTS YOU TO DO ANYTHING MUCH, TOO QUICKLY.

HOWEVER, AS INCREASING NUMBERS OF YOUR PARTNERS BEGIN TO PUT PRESSURE ON YOU AND YOUR TIME WITH EACH PASSING DAY, YOUR ABILITY TO CONTROL YOUR SCHEDULE WILL EVAPORATE VERY QUICKLY."

SET YOUR AGENDA

As one managing partner cautioned, "there is a natural desire to establish yourself as highly responsive to issues brought to your attention. There are times, I have found, that being responsive has served to drag out issues that, if I had done nothing for a couple of days, would have resolved on their own without my input. Thus, while somewhat counterintuitive, there is some wisdom in not trying to immediately solve every issue that is brought your way. The art to it, of course (and the part that is obviously the most difficult to figure out) is deciding which issues need the managing partner's attention and which will resolve, perhaps more elegantly, without that attention."

Identify your one burning imperative.

While you may have a number of important objectives to tackle, to satisfy both your and the Executive Committee's requirements, start with establishing only one key imperative. When people talk about getting everyone on the same page, this is the page they are talking about.

Your imperative should pinpoint that one critical area in your firm that demands attention; that area that offers the greatest opportunity to contribute to a dramatic improvement in performance.

Get critical partner buy-in.

Draft a written statement of your burning imperative, why it is important and what impact it would have on the firm if action were to be effectively implemented. Share it with your key partners, one by one over the first weeks of taking office, and invite them to improve upon it. Collect their suggestions and support, and incorporate their views and suggestions into your final draft where appropriate. A shared priority can serve to drive everyone's attention. Ensure that it is compelling enough to obtain your partner's support.

Develop an action plan to implement your initiative.

Start planning what you hope to accomplish by specific milestones.

One new managing partner, wanting to ensure that everyone understood that his number one declared imperative was to build strong practice teams, subsequently spent the first month visiting with every group, and attending every group meeting that was scheduled. He exposed himself to hearing about which groups were working effectively, which were dysfunctional, which were in need of extra resources or executive support, and which required a change in group leadership. He set out his vision and then asked people to help him realize it.

Launch a pilot project

Look for an area where you might initiate a pilot project that can be instigated immediately. Your project can serve to expose partners to new ways of operating (internal) or have them envision new approaches to viewing their marketplace (external). A successful pilot can set your overall plan in motion, energize people and yield some quick improvements.

EXPLOIT EARLY SUCCESSES

Equipped with a clear picture of your most important priority, you can proceed to create detailed plans for how you might secure and exploit some quick successes. Early wins are all about credibility and confidence.

Identify something that would not have happened had it not been for your burning imperative.

People have enormous faith in leaders who are able to deliver even the smallest success. The brutal truth about executing on your priority is that it will always take more time than you think and it will usually take more resources than you expect.

SOME COMMON FAUX PAS TO AVOID:

- ***Do not create unrealistic expectations about what you can manage to accomplish and / or manage to accomplish within a specified timeframe.***
- ***Do not appear to be openly critical of the previous regime in terms of its leadership or strategy.***
- ***Do not become overwhelmed, by the common feeling experienced by all new leaders, that you have to have all of the answers.***

For a new managing partner to publicly honor and call attention to significant milestones focuses the firm on priorities. In the early weeks call attention to small successes that align with what you identified as your one burning issue. You need to consciously be on the lookout for reasons to celebrate winning events.

Stay On Track

Fortunately, the first 100 days is more a term of art than a day of reckoning. Most managing partners report that their performance is only really evaluated after their first full year in office.

That said, you should think about what you need to do in three phases: get well connected with the views of your peers before the official handoff occurs; build your personal credibility within the first 30 days; and then focus your energy on achieving small successes towards the realization of your one burning imperative in the following 60 days. Look at this as a distinctive time when your firm has a tolerance for change and you have a unique opportunity to imprint your legacy.

FIRST 100 DAY'S

Voices of Experience

Following my completing the draft of** FIRST 100 DAYS, **I thought I would send it to a few managing partners hoping to hear where I was completely off-base, solicit some experienced advice and perhaps a few real-world examples.

> *"I expect that you would agree that they are times when we all think to rselves, "I wish I knew that when . . . "*
>
> *The attached is meant to capture one of those times – those first days when some brave soul within our firm takes on that important task of being the new managing partner. And you've been there now, so you know better than most, what that is all about.*
>
> *What I would like to have your views and insight on is what specific guidance you might offer your very best friend who is about to take on this job."*

I was hoping to get a half-dozen, one-sentence quotes that I could insert into my draft.

Instead – the response was overwhelming!

I didn't get a sentence or two; I got paragraph on paragraph of rich and robust thoughts, views and stories.

What follows is what the voices of experience can teach us all:

Having gone through this transition twice, in the first 100 days I would also focus some of my attention on the key administrative staff, including the executive director. These people are more used to hierarchical thinking so the change at the top affects them greatly. In many ways they are just as important as the lawyers in your firm, in developing relationships and understanding their priorities.

BEN C. ADAMS, JR.—*Chairman & CEO*
Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz, PC (Memphis)

I would suggest that you meet with every partner one-on-one for an hour, take every practice group leader and the senior staff [all too often ignored] to lunch, one on one. And complete this goal within 3 months, 3 weeks if possible. Then make sure you do something high profile your predecessor did not do: start a very timely newsletter reporting on what you are doing; improve the comprehendability of the monthly financial status reports; attend senior staff meetings for awhile (just to watch and listen – you will be surprised how informative this is); and / or introduce some new way for your lawyers to socialize together.

Don't micro manage. If your predecessor was micro managing an area, stop it immediately. Be careful where you are seen to spend your time. You may be able to save hundreds of dollars changing the food service arrangements – but is this where you want everyone to see you providing leadership?

Remember- it's not about you and it is about you. No monuments will be built in your image, no matter how well you do. The job is about the contribution you will know you made and the pleasure you will take in making it. I have no time for the 'I had to do it' explanation of why someone took the M.P. job. If you don't want it, don't take it. If you take it - enjoy the task of building for everyone's benefit

STEWART D. SAXE —*former Office Managing Partner*
Baker & McKenzie LLP

I think wise leaders in a profession changing as rapidly as the legal industry are going to make some people unhappy if they're not working hard to position their firm for the future. So, I would challenge any new MP to elevate their thinking and create their visions of what their law firm can become.

ROBERT S. PATTERSON.—*former Managing Director*
Boult Cummings Conners & Berry, PLC (Nashville)

As soon as possible, spend as much time as necessary with your CFO learning what the key performance indicators are for the financial success of your Firm. If you Firm is coming off of a particularly good or bad year, understand what the drivers were for that year. Understand what makes the Firm tick financially and communicate those key performance indicators to your management team / Executive Committee.

NEIL H. WASSER —*Managing Member*
Constangy, Brooks & Smith, LLC (Atlanta)

In the first hundred days I believe you should be spending a fair amount of your time listening, as opposed to coming in and making a lot of changes right off the bat. There's plenty of time for that, and it's simply foolish to make changes (assuming things are going well) until you're confident you've got a relatively good feel for the lay of the land, including the politics.

Avoid letting yourself be sucked into a lot of administrivia. There will always be lots of people who want their minor issues decided by the chair or the managing partner, and if you give early signals that you are available for that, the administrivia will soon overwhelm you and prevent you from doing the important and strategic things that really should be your focus.

Give your non-lawyer chiefs (at our firm, the COO, CFO and CMO) the benefit of the doubt. Get to know them, trust them, and be sure to back their decisions unless they are plainly wrong (which won't be often). These are experienced professionals who can save you enormous amounts of time and give you extremely valuable perspective if you work properly with them. A long time ago, when I was a young lieutenant in the Army reporting to a new post and a new position, my principal sergeant said to me, "I hope we can work well together, sir. Just remember, I can make you look very good or very bad." Sound advice, which I have never forgotten.

JOHN A. MACLEOD —*former Chairman*
Crowell & Moring LLP (Washington DC)

Be quick to give credit to others, both as to the source of ideas and successes. Your constituents will be watching to see whether you are the type of person to claim credit for every success and lay blame for failure on others. Ensure that they see the reverse.

Think about the best listener that you know and become that person. Becoming a great listener has several benefits. Everyone likes to be listened to and when they are listened to by the new

Managing Partner, they feel valued. In listening closely to your partners (and watching their body language) you will hear many things, a number of which may be truly instructive and helpful. The more you listen, the less you speak – at this initial stage, you are not ready to make any specific promises or commitments.

Become an advocate for one important change. Make this the focus of your first 100 days. This change should be one that you know has broad support from the partnership and one which you believe is achievable in a year or less.

And recognize the fact that as important as this time is for you, it is also important for your predecessor. Your predecessor is making an equally, if not more difficult transition than you are. Ensure that your predecessor feels wanted and respected within the firm. Seek his or her advice often and, most importantly; ensure that others in the firm know that you are doing so. Wherever possible, give your predecessor credit for achievements both on his or her watch and on yours.

ROBERT VINEBERG
Davies, Ward, Phillips & Vineberg (Montreal)

Personally, I enjoy the ability to float an idea, secure reactions, and decide what to do on a collaborative basis. That was very easy when I was Deputy Managing Partner. Shortly after becoming MP, I realized that many people in the firm, including even close friends and trusted advisers, were being considerably more deferential than they had been in the past. I additionally realized that some things I said rather casually, on an exploratory basis, were being taken far more seriously than I intended -- sometimes as as an edict. You have to make your colleagues and support team very comfortable that you welcome differing views and even dissent in discussions and policy formulation -- understanding that, once we set the policy, we all support it.

Early in my MP tenure I also learned that little gestures had significance far beyond their significance just a short time before. I recall a simple thing like I offered condolences to one of our staff personnel whose grandmother had died. She had no idea how I knew, but told a number of people how much the comment meant to her. Everything you do is magnified, and you have to realize that. Even if you are a bit worn down, smile. People derive a lot of their outlook from the outlook of their leaders, and it makes them feel good if you appear in good spirits.

Additionally, you need to realize that time is your most precious asset. People want your time. They want to tell you when they are doing something good; they want to hear from you about *things going on around the firm. Dispense your time well. You need to strike a fine balance: you should be accessible, but you need to be efficient. You want people to understand that they should prepare properly for their time with you.*

I also learned that you should always think twice before uttering a harsh word, before "going negative". I make it my policy to sleep on a negative message one night before sending it. Usually the overnight causes me to moderate my response.

Another message I learned early was to check my ego at the door (at least I have tried to do so!) I should not care whether I get credit for something. In a couple of notable successes for the Firm, I have had an idea, worked to persuade someone, been unsuccessful, and then a short time later been approached by that person with his / her great new idea. That person thought he got his / her way, and credit; and that is fine by me, because the right idea was implemented.

Get others excited about the new regime by encouraging them that they will have a role. Early on in my tenure as Managing Partner, I assigned leadership positions to some of the younger partners, and told them that these assignments were my invitation to get involved, to show leadership, to help shape the future of their firm.

MICHAEL E. NANNES— *Managing Partner*
Dickstein Shapiro Morin & Oshinsky LLP (Washington DC)

I *would remind a new managing partner that the line between exuberance and arrogance, especially in the minds of those partners who were not supportive of that person's candidacy, is a fine one. The new managing partner would do well to listen more and speak less in the first 30 days to those who were not on board with the agenda that put the new managing partner in place. While garnering support from every partner may not be possible, garnering respect from most everyone is an achievable goal.*

PHILLIP L. BAYT—*co-Managing Partner*
Ice Miller (Indianapolis)

W*hat I found most difficult was trying to have all of the answers and feeling responsible for all firm matters instead of focusing on the strategic priorities and delegating projects to the administrative staff and/or other Executive Committee members. It is important that a new Managing Partner make it clear that there are certain firm matters which are the responsibility of the administrative staff although the Managing Partner is available to have the matter dealt with in a timely fashion. Also, as a corollary to the tendency to feel like you have to have all of* *the answers a new Managing Partner needs to be on the lookout for issues upon which he needs to get consensus even if the issues are not in his mind strategic.*

Your partners have to feel that you have their best interests in mind and that you are willing to sacrifice personal goals for the good of the firm. Keeping a positive outlook and a can-do attitude. Make your partners feel that you are doing your best to help them succeed in their practice. In communicating with your partners patience is a must. Many times the Managing Partner with the help of the administrative staff and / or the Executive Committee will roll out a new initiative or firm policy based upon weeks or months of discussion and input. However, at the partnership meeting questions may be raised which seem to you as elementary or trivial since you have been fully engaged in the project. It is important in these situations to take a deep breath and succinctly explain the background for the decision and the reasons for the action being taken.

MICHAEL ZATELZALO—*Managing Director*
Kegler, Brown, Hill & Ritter (Columbus)

Your actions are watched very closely for the first several months as your partners attempt to read what is in store under the new regime. As important as what you do or say is what you do not do or say- as your partners will invariably read the most negative inference to any ambiguous conduct.

DARYLE L. UPHOFF—*Chairman and Managing Partner*
Lindquist & Vennum P.L.L.P. (Minneapolis)

You should arrange for the shortest possible transition time between the official announcement and your taking office - 12 or 18 months at the most. During that transition period, the successor should engage in a dialogue with the incumbent to candidly discuss how to move out in front on issues without undermining the incumbent so that the baton is passed seamlessly.

In the beginning, the most difficult aspect of the job is how to prioritize one's time; and time management goes beyond simply prioritizing issues or establishing an agenda. Skills learned only over time include learning how to delegate without compromising the objective, deciding what meetings and functions are really important, focusing the right amount of time to issues and agenda items most in need of personal attention, and making the decision-making process more efficient. In the early years, I tended to do many things entirely by myself and present a near finished product for review. Today, I am better at finding those who can and will take ownership of initiatives and projects without requiring too much of my personal attention. You need to carefully budget your time for the first hundred days and hold yourself to your budget.

Who can you count on? A new managing partner should concentrate on identifying those who are prepared to take ownership of aspects of the firm, and those who are going to be obstacles to achieving the goals. Especially in firms like ours, which thrive on respect for one's fellow partner, just getting people out of the positions for which they are not suited can take years. The first hundred days (and the days leading up to the first hundred days) should include planning transitions of partners into and out of key roles. It would be useful but unrealistic to require that every department head, key committee chair, etc. tender their resignations effective on the day the new managing partner takes over. My advice: Begin the process of demanding accountability from established partners in key position according to your priorities, not theirs.

My predecessor was entirely internally focused. I have tried to be externally focused, although events and circumstances constantly draw me internally. The new managing partner must decide the right balance early on and stick to it. Don't be seduced into the belief that one can alter the focus later as circumstances dictate. Decide whether you are Mr. (Ms) Outside or Mr. (Ms) Inside. You probably can't be both.

MICHAEL L. RODBURG—*Managing Director*
Lowenstein Sandler PC (Roseland)

I will tell my successor to have a sense of humor, to put the serious problems as well as the petty squabbles into perspective and to be sure to have a life outside of the office. I would suggest spending some time with a psychologist who understands the personality traits that lawyers have compared with society in general - our resilience, sociability and skepticism are off the charts compared with the general population. Understanding the lawyer personality in general and the personalities of individual partners will go a long way.

I would also urge my successor to be very proactive in leadership development and training. With very, very few exceptions, the successful law firm of the not so distant future will require people who have leadership skills.

LOIS M. VAN DEUSEN—*Managing Partner*
McCarter & English, LLP (Newark)

If one has never been a manager of a law firm it is amazing how much you don't know. You can intellectually understand the five levers of profitability, but it takes a long time to understand how those levers act in different Practice Groups in different circumstances, and how they can be manipulated to create seemingly good PPP numbers that in fact are not healthy. It takes a long *time to understand the personalities of partners and PGL's, and how they affect the operations of the firm. It takes a long time to understand the benchmarking, both objective and subjective, of your firm against peers. It takes a long time to understand how to sell lateral partners and how to separate the good ones from the bad. It takes a long time to know when you are being rolled by your partners and when you are not. I could go on. I think it is important to identify priorities, but beyond that I would spend a lot of time talking to partners, PGL's, your Executive Director and others just getting a feel for day-to-day problems. I would attend every meeting I could at the operational and PG level. I would ask my Executive Director to walk with me all day and teach me. I would visit every office and get to know key personnel and the culture. There is nothing more damaging than trying to come across as knowledgeable when you are not, or taking positions that later prove to be ill conceived. Don't let the 100-day challenge force precipitous decisions.*

I would encourage a new MP to reach out to experienced MP's of other firms and ask for help. They are always glad to do it, and I have developed a core of close relationships as a result. They are an excellent source of knowledge about new developments and new ideas.

I would emphasize how important it is to be prepared to live with and facilitate compromise. New leaders often think they can make great changes just by having the will to do it (I certainly did). Unfortunately, when your inventory can walk out the door, compromise becomes the name of the game. Cultivating strong and supportive relationships with key partners is an absolute necessity to forging positive compromise—you need clout and backing.

FRANCIS M. MILONE —*Firm Chair*
Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP (Philadelphia)

Do your job. What I mean by that is do not shirk from what may be unpleasant. Part of leadership is doing what needs to be done when it needs to be done. We all like to work on things we like and put off ones we don't. That's not an option for managing partners and particularly not in the early days when you must establish your credibility. And, don't get discouraged. Lawyers are conservative by nature and your brilliant insights for how to finally get the firm to "run like a business" may not be received with the ringing endorsement you expect.

JERRY H. BIEDERMAN—*Managing Partner*
Neal, Gerber & Eisenberg LLP (Chicago)

New managing partners have to resist the temptation to take on the most pressing issues first because they are likely to be the most difficult. If you fail early, everything you try after *that will be doubly more difficult. If you succeed early, everything thereafter will be easier.*

There are managing partner groups in most major legal centers where managing partners get together periodically -- usually breakfast or lunch -- to discuss issues of mutual concern. These groups are useful to get some good ideas and more importantly, learn that virtually every firm -- even the ones that you perceive to be incredibly well run -- are struggling with most of the same issues that are keeping you awake at night.

New managing partners need also to be reminded that their relationships with colleagues in their own firms will change once they take office. Some partners who were friends will now be jealous, while others will seek to take advantage of the relationship. Others will look for evidence of favoritism even when none exists. Self-awareness of this phenomenon helps.

New managing partners cannot be afraid of making mistakes. In a large firm, at least, the new managing partner will make or influence hundreds of decisions each week. You cannot approach the job with the view that you have to be perfect. Perfect is the enemy of the good. So long as you understand the consequences of being wrong (a relatively minor decision gone wrong where you can later get it right is different than a major decision that commits substantial firm resources), you can afford to make mistakes. Importantly, learn to know when you made a mistake and act promptly to deal with it. Making decisions promptly and correcting erroneous decisions will build your authority, while agonizing over ever decision will undermine it.

Finally, understand that you will not win every battle within the firm or within the Executive Committee. Learn to lose with grace. If you lose, analyze why and attempt to address those factors the next time. Not every issue that comes to the Executive Committee is worth a war. Choose your fights carefully.

STUART M. PAPE—*Managing Partner*
Patton Boggs LLP (Washington DC)

I *would suggest some early attention be directed to the staff and leadership partner teams you have in place to leverage your time and get your early plans executed effectively. Early meetings to set objectives and build a sense of purpose and commitment can greatly amplify the impact of the first 100 days. Our early agenda was to stimulate our partners to embrace change as a good thing.*

At our first partner's retreat, we took the partners on a "sacred cow" hunt: we invited the author *of "Sacred Cows make the Best Burgers" to talk about the implications of old and tired routines in an organization. We then divided the partners into groups, gave them lists of some of the hallowed by inefficient ways of doing things in the Firm, and and then asked the partners to use non-judgmental brainstorming techniques to come up with new ways to do things. The exercise was a win-win -win: the partners had fun, we got some great ideas, and we were seen as a change oriented leadership team*

MARY B. CRANSTON —*Firm Chair*
Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP (San Francisco)

In those first 100 days you are still dealing with client transition issues, no matter how well you planned in advance.

I believe it important to talk with and listen to anyone who was a critic of the prior managing partner. While you may not agree with their views or move the firm in the direction they want, by meeting with them you convey that their opinion is important and is being heard. I also feel that if you do not hear from a diverse sampling of your partners, the information you receive starts to be filtered and you become isolated as to the "real world" about what is happening in the firm - much like a President may be criticized for not being in touch with what most Americans are saying.

A lack of strength in finances / accounting will likely be common for new managing partners given the normal undergraduate tracks to law school and the utter failure of most law schools to discuss, at any level, the business operations of being in law. In this area, I have spent a lot of time with our Executive Director being schooled on the finances; and have called in a business owner friend to help me develop a "dashboard" view of the information that I need to know and monitor.

STEPHEN O. PLUNKETT—*Managing Partner*
Rider Bennett, LLP (Minneapolis)

Most managing partners begin with an ambitious agenda (or they should to have any chance of success). The first 100 days is a great benchmark for the purpose of focusing on creating a credible platform to accomplish your goals. I believe it helpful for those goals to explicitly include both strategic and operational issues. There is no firm these days that does not have needs in both dimensions, and a successful initial tenure ought to have one or two early successes in both areas.

Law firm managers are a confident lot, but they usually have little background to run a large business -- they have no academic training as managers, and their instincts as lawyers usually are more of an impediment to success. So, in my view, new managing partners should begin with the humble recognition that they are not terribly well qualified for the job.

JOHN T. MONTGOMERY—*Managing Partner*
Ropes & Gray LLP (Boston)

I would emphasize the enormous value of a managing partner's listening more than he / she talks, at all time projecting confidence and thoughtful optimism about the future, exhibiting empathy for the situations of everyone and understanding the difficulty of change - - any kind of change, no matter how small. (I believe that all four of these are very important throughout a managing partner's tenure.)

DUANE C. QUAINI—*Firm Chair*
Sonnenschein Nath & Rosenthal LLP (Chicago)

Learn how the organization really works. The leader needs to know the mechanical aspects of delivering the products to clients. In the end, the leader is responsible for having the trains run on time. And, if your Executive Committee does not know where the firm is going over the next 1or 2 years, you have a recipe for disaster. Do not take the job. It takes a long time to make real change in a firm. If the firm has no short-term direction, it will be very hard for a new leader to build the political capital needed to make change.

MARK A. MILLER—*Chief Executive Officer*
Whyte Hirschboeck Dudek S.C. (Milwaukee)

About The Author

PATRICK J. MCKENNA is a seasoned law firm strategist and leading management advisor. Since 1983 he has worked with the top management of premier law firms internationally to discuss, challenge and escalate their thinking on how to manage and compete effectively. He is co-author of business bestseller First Among Equals and the book Management Skills (2005 - John Wiley/Jossey-Bass) named McKenna among the leading thinkers in the field of business management.

Recent Articles & White Papers

This monograph is part of a series for managing partners available for download at:
www.patrickmckenna.com

Management's Burning Issues

The result of asking managing partners what their 'Burning Issues' were – those critical business issues concerning strategy, growth, practice management, professional development and so forth, currently occupying leadership agendas.

The Changing of The Guard: Selecting Your Next Managing Partner

Every law firm eventually finds itself in need of a new leader. This paper methodically walks you through the steps involved in effective leadership succession.

The Logic For Having An Advisory Board

Sometimes it may be smart to break some windows, let in some fresh air and hear from an outside business perspective.

A Profile of Today's Managing Partner

A survey of over 100 managing partners covering how they got their job, whether they have a formal job description, how they spend their time, what guidance they are given and how they are evaluated among other dynamics of the job.

For general information contact:

Patrick J. McKenna
EDGE INTERNATIONAL INC.
Ashridge House
11226 – 60 Street
Edmonton, Canada
T5W 3Y8

www.edge.ai
(800) 921-3343
(780) 428-1052

Designer: Jim Prokell
Jim Prokell Studio
website: www.jimprokellstudio.com