

BUSINESS & CAREERS

# Five signs of an effective group leader

Increasingly, "leadership" is becoming the most sought after intangible skill set for law firms seeking to augment their position in the market. Whether for succession, consolidation, growth or other reasons, managing partners are increasingly concerned with having an effective stable of leadership talent on their team. Here are five keys headhunters look for when spotting leadership talent in today's market:



THE HEADHUNTER  
**WARREN SMITH**

**A team with clarity of purpose**

With high-performing lawyers abound, what separates the leaders from the pack often has to do with their ability to build an effective team to carry out larger goals in the market. There is an upper limit to what an individual lawyer is able to accomplish, so teams are a necessity when building sustainable, larger practises.

Whether the specialty is in the

field of litigation, insolvency or cross-border securities, practise group leaders should have a clear, compelling goal for their teams that reaches beyond their current market offering. Integral to such a plan is that all team members, not just the leader, must understand the goal(s) of the group.

Do your associates know what your practise goals are? Who are you trying to target in the market? Who are your chief competitors? How do you differentiate in the market? The more people on the team who can answer these types of questions, the better able they will be to focus their individual efforts towards a common goal.

**Willing to share critical feedback**

While it is easy enough for the lead partner to criticize team members, the true test of an effective practise group leader is his or her ability to receive critical feedback. Do your team members willingly provide you with honest feedback? Do you create an environment where your team can hold you accountable? If not, why not?

Creating a group dynamic that permits team members to share their concerns in a manner that doesn't threaten job security creates a tight bond — it permits the leader to better understand the group dynamic, but perhaps more importantly, it affords the leader an opportunity to take corrective measures to further improve the overall performance of the group. Done properly, this can be one of the most powerful

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Reporting to the Town Manager, this position acts as Corporate legal counsel and is responsible for providing the Town (Council and Administration) with legal advice; including coordinating and managing the legal service area which is comprised of the Municipal Clerk's Office, Legal Services, and Municipal Law Enforcement. This position will also be responsible to research and advance corporate policy that supports and guides the organization for the consideration of the Town Manager and Council. Manages and oversees the statutory duties of the clerk as well as the municipal law enforcement activities. Attends council/committee meetings; performs representative duties related to the portfolio/corporation and on behalf of the Town Manager as required/assigned; contributes to the strategic direction and management of the Town as a member of its senior management team and champions the corporate mission and values.

Preferred candidates will have a University degree in Law (L.L.B.) and a license to practice as a lawyer in Ontario by the Law Society of Upper Canada, accompanied with 5-10 years experience as a lawyer. The individual will have demonstrated working knowledge of municipal legislation/regulations including: the *Municipal Act 2001*, *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, *Municipal Elections Act*, *Municipal Conflict of Interest Act*, and related legislation. The candidate will have demonstrated experience in municipal regulatory and/or government administrative environment, including experience working with elected officials / boards; proven public relations, excellent customer service, interpersonal, project/time management, analytical, problem solving, presentation, and communication skills, with a demonstrated ability in staff leadership and supervision. In addition, the successful candidate must be available to attend evening and/or weekend meetings or other events as required, and possess a valid class G driver's license in good standing with reliable transportation.

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## BUSINESS &amp; CAREERS

# Buy groceries, draft a will from same place

## Alternative

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as our profession in Canada has been. Canadian law societies, in my view, have always been quick and eager to respond to the needs or changes.”

Hume says that “there’s clearly always a challenge in providing legal services to middle-income people” and that any move toward ABS in Canada would come because the law societies decide it will help middle-income people get what they currently can’t get from the legal industry. “We remain somewhat skeptical that alternative business structures can improve services,” he says, “but if in fact it proves to provide better service elsewhere, we need to be moving on that, given our mandate to protect the public interest.”

Interestingly, the LSBC report states, “No independent analysis of the public interest risks and benefits appears to have taken place in England. The English government seems to have been prepared to take a leap of faith into ABSs and to bring

the profession along with it.”

Thanks to the U.K. impetuosity, Canada is well positioned to be, in effect, proactively reactive. Our law societies can watch as events unfold in Australia, the U.K. and, as seems increasingly likely, the U.S. In doing so, they’re not waiting for the Justice Department or a parliamentary committee to do the work for them.

“We have been watching developments in Britain and Australia closely,” said Malcolm Heins, CEO of The Law Society of Upper Canada. “Our focus with respect to the regulation of business structures through which legal professionals practice is on ensuring that the structure facilitates competent and professional delivery of legal services and does not derogate from the duties owed to a client.”

The LSBC report’s ultimate position on ABS, spelled out on its first page (“Ultimately, the *form* of the structure through which legal services are offered is less important than it is to ensure that the services that are offered are properly



Hume

regulated”), is the basic confidence in the power of regulation to keep any newfangled business-side innovation from adversely affecting the public interest in optimal access to legal services. Such confidence would likely strike the average private citizen as touchingly credulous, if

not downright naïve.

The corporate world of the post-Lehman Brothers popular imagination is the nastiest and most brutish of jungles; there seems to be no regulation that a properly motivated — that is to say, publicly-traded — corporation can’t elude. Much of what happened on Wall Street in the run-up to the 2008 recession was contra regulation, but feel free to ask the Securities and Exchange Commission what went wrong there.

Then again, Canada is the country whose banks stayed clear, for the most part, of subprime mortgages. The system worked in that case. And it’s worth remembering that a version of this conversation has already taken place and that a version of ABS has already been ratified by two of Canada’s law societies: multi-disciplinary partnerships, which allow non-legal professionals (e.g., accountants) to hold minority stakes in law practices, are permitted in both B.C. and Ontario.

For now, the law societies are content to play a game of wait-and-see. ■

## Top leaders are able to recruit and retain talent

### Leader

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tools in creating an effective practise group. Strong leaders recognize this, and take frequent steps to pro-actively solicit feedback from their team members.

### Your team values your feedback

An equally important indicator of an effective leader is whether team members value their feedback. In order to be effective, a leader must properly understand the team members, and be able to take proactive steps to provide meaningful feedback on their career and skills development.

An effective leader is able to create both a compelling future and explain to each team member how their role is key to the success of the group. They are able to take into account the diverse interests and goals of their team members, while keeping the group focused on a higher, shared goal.

One easy way to test whether your words carry weight on your team: if your team members keep (and possibly have on display) any letters, cards, or comments you’ve written to them over the years that relate to their efforts as a team member.

### Your team has low turnover

Perhaps the greatest indicator of an effective leader is the lack of unforced turnover. Strong leaders have the ability to both recruit effectively (reducing the need for forced turnover), and create a compelling vision.

One key indicator is how associates are managed through to partnership: Do they have a clear understanding of group needs, and what they must do in order to be successful in the group? Are they well man-

aged as they prepare for transition to partnership? If they are not going to join the partnership, do they have a clear understanding as to why? Do the leaders provide alternate paths (and assist with soft landings) where partnership is not reasonably achievable?

If your associates feel invested in the process, turnover tends to be considerably lower, which makes future recruitment easier, perpetuating the potential for success in the group.

### People are drawn to your team


Where a practice group exhibits some (or all) of these traits, it tends to draw in further talent to the group. As a headhunter, there are typically three or four practise group leaders in a given market who are standouts — associates and partners alike are drawn to their teams, as they have developed reputations as leaders in the field.

Do you receive frequent, unprompted inquiries to join your practise group, either within the firm or from outside? Are headhunters often seeking your input on whether your group has immediate or future needs?

It is these traits that clients and recruiters look for when considering who to approach with a possible need in the market. ■

*Warren Smith is a managing director of The Counsel Network, Canada’s oldest lawyer recruitment and career consulting firm. He is the only Canadian elected to the board of directors of the National Association of Legal Search Consultants.*

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