

Leadership Strategies in Supervising National and Regional Claims Professionals

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Leadership. What is it? The Oxford Dictionary defines leadership, in its most basic sense, as "...the action of leading a group of people or an organization".

McKinsey & Company expands on that definition, noting that leadership "...is a set of behaviors used to help people align their collective direction, to execute strategic plans, to continually renew an organization". And when you think about it, all leaders, whether they be corporate executives, coaches of sports teams, school principals, etc. - all do this - to one degree or another.

How do those principles apply to a claims operation, operating in an increasingly global and digitalized world? A world where legal professionals and claims managers operate across diverse legal landscapes. Where the regional or district office may be someone's home office. Where you aren't able to simply walk down the hall and interact with your team.

Where a manager may have to deal with multi-jurisdictional claims involving a myriad of different laws and regulatory environments. From different statutes of limitations and varying evidentiary issues to nuanced case law specific to a given locale. Gone are the days when claims leadership can master one jurisdiction and call it a day.

Clearly, the role of a leader in this space requires someone to have a deep understanding of the diverse legal landscape but also the leadership skills to harmonize operations and integrate a diverse set of individuals to drive success. The goal of this paper is to offer several considerations for management (whether it be a claims manager or law office managing partner) to keep in mind in supervising a team of claims professionals and lawyers.

On the surface, this may sound like a daunting task, given the noted complexities of the current insurance industry/legal landscape. But at the end of this paper, you may ask yourself, does the current industry landscape really require any new principles of leadership? Or are the lessons and wisdom of past great leaders the true source of guidance in this area? Certainly, this is not a topic that lends itself to "one-size-fits-all" approach, but hopefully the suggestions below will be a benefit. No doubt many of these suggestions may seem to be obvious, and ones you have heard before. But that in no way diminishes the effectiveness of these suggestions.

Leadership Framework:

1. Communication: it goes without saying, effective leadership starts with good communication with your team. You have to be willing to LISTEN to your team and create a culture of open communication. Be creative in this space. Don't just rely on emails or text messages, but at the same time utilize the gift of technology to facilitate this process. What is the best way to create that culture?

2. Goals: be clear in your stated goals and the reasons for those goals. This will facilitate "buy-in" from your team. But at the same time, be willing to adapt and accept their input and suggestions.

While "it's my way or the highway" can be an easy default, is "your way" always the best. In this regard, it is crucial to get to know your team and exactly what they do. As best you can, try to walk a day "...in their shoes". Be receptive to input and open to ideas that may be better than yours.

Share the reasoning for your goal and the rationale behind it. Embolden your team to make decisions on their own to achieve the stated goal. Create an environment where the team believes in your trust in them and where accountability is both expected and desired. You must show your team that you trust their input and abilities.

Above all, be willing to admit your mistakes and own them. In other words, check your ego at the door!

3. Training: the need for continuous training is obvious. Training for the sake of training is not the best course. Make sure your training regimen is targeted at specific goals with meaning. Here again, solicit the input of your team as to what type of training would be best for the given task. Effective training will lead to broad-based and in-depth knowledge for your team members. The positive effect of that is obvious- armed with knowledge and confidence, your team members can make those decisions on the road to achieving your goal.

4. Ethical Considerations: in a world where we are all continually graded on metrics and results, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that the old mantra of "win at all costs" is not always the best course of action. Create an environment that doing things the right way, the *ethical way*, adhering to company and/or legal principles, will still allow your team to win in the end. Here, more than any other area, there is an opportunity for the manager to lead by example. It must be made clear to the team that your organization adheres to a unified ethical standard while respecting the laws of a given jurisdiction.

Challenges and Possible Solutions:

1. Legal/Regulatory Issues: while it may seem elementary, it is crucial to develop a mechanism for your team, to share knowledge and information to keep track of the evolving, legal landscape. It is crucial to encourage collaboration of your team members, both within your organization, and outside of it to address jurisdiction - specific issues, while adhering to the overall goal of the organization.

Here again, many of the principles outlined above are central to success. The space provides a great example of where the lives of empowering your team members can be a huge benefit.

2. Cultural Variations: effective leadership requires an understanding and acknowledgment of cultural diversity within the team, as well as within the various jurisdictions in which you operate. It is crucial to create an atmosphere of cultural exchanges when they are the norm, and not an exception. This will lead to an atmosphere of better understanding and acceptance among your team members and those colleagues outside of your organization.

3. Team culture: obviously, with the challenges created for all of us through the pandemic, this topic is come to the fore. Now more than ever, it is imperative that the effective leader create opportunities for periodic team, meetings or conference is – preferably in person. While this may seem to be “old-school”, there is no question that in-person interaction is a very effective way to build a cohesive team unit.

Thoughts from Great Leaders for Your Consideration:

Set forth below is a collection of quotes from various leaders collected over time. The author's considered these quotes in providing this framework of suggestions. Hopefully you'll find them, if nothing else, somewhat interesting, and entertaining...

Failure to prepare is preparing to fail.
John wooden

The greatest lesson in life is to know that even fools are right sometimes.
Churchill

Eating words has never given me indigestion.
Churchill.

It is a mistake to look too far ahead. Only one link in the chain of destiny can be handled at a time. –
Churchill.

Leadership: the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it.
George S Patton:

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."
Helen Keller

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of chaked and controversy "
Martin Luther King

"I have learned that success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed"
Booker T. Washington

Sources for paper:

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By Ret. Col. Kim Campbell

"What is leadership: A definition and way forward"
McKinsey & Company

"Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance"
By Angela Duckworth

“Find Your Why: A Practical Guide for Discovering Purpose for You and Your Team”
By Simon Sinek