



Ethical Leadership in Challenging Political Times

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Challenges

In an era defined by polarization, rapid information cycles, and heightened public scrutiny, legal leaders are being asked to navigate ethical dilemmas that are more complex—and more consequential—than ever. This session explores how in-house counsel and law firm leaders can anchor their decision-making in core ethical principles while responding to political pressures, stakeholder expectations, and organizational mission.

Through real-world scenarios and candid discussion, this session equips legal leaders with practical tools to uphold professional responsibility, maintain credibility, and guide their organizations with principled confidence—no matter how turbulent the political environment becomes.



Focus Areas

- **Lead with clarity and integrity** when political dynamics create uncertainty or tension within the organization.
- **Strengthen ethical decision-making frameworks** that help legal teams respond consistently, even when the “right” answer is not immediately obvious.
- **Align legal strategy with organizational mission and values**, ensuring that counsel remains a stabilizing force rather than a reactive one.
- **Manage internal and external pressures**, including board expectations, employee activism, client demands, and public perception.
- **Build cultures of trust and accountability** that empower teams to raise concerns early and navigate disagreements constructively.



Leadership Overview

1. **Why / Who:** Why do legal professionals need education and training on Leadership?
2. **What:** What is Leadership?
3. **How:** Leadership Styles + Archetypes
4. **Critical Components of Successful Leadership**
5. **Ten Priorities for Effective Leaders**
6. **Additional Resources**

1.

Why Do Legal Professionals Need Education and Training on Leadership?

Why Train on Leadership?

- Lawyers are Leaders!
- Leadership does not come naturally to most. Good leaders are made, not born.
- Good leaders / leadership helps get everyone on the same page – sharpens focus, synchronizes effort
- Everything in leadership is simple; it's just that the simplest things are difficult.
- To do this right does NOT require a sophisticated chart, a calculus formula, or a complex algorithm, *but it does require some training, assistance, and guidance.*
- Mottoes, creeds, parables, and stories are just one way to provide the necessary guidance: Why? Because it *sends a message.*
- THAT's why we study and train on leadership! Mentor your people!

Social and Emotional Issues in America, and in the Legal Profession – A Lack of Civility and Wellness

In response, various courts and Bar Associations have called for stronger leadership

54%

of Americans admit that they don't really know each other very well

36%

of lawyers admit that they are problem drinkers

45%

of high school students admit that they're persistently hopeless and despondent

28%

of lawyers struggle with depression

2.

What: Varied Definitions of Leadership

What Is Leadership?

- “Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something that you want done because the person wants to do it.”

- *General and President Dwight D. Eisenhower*

- Leadership is a function of knowing yourself, having a vision that is well communicated, building trust among colleagues, and taking effective action to realize your own leadership potential.”

- *Warren Bennis, Leadership Pioneer, Professor*

- “Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others.”

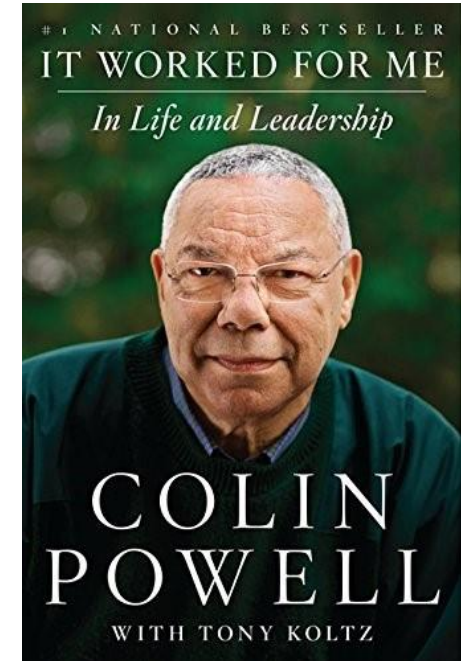
- *Jack Welch, Chairman / CEO of GE*



Source: General Eisenhower Memorial Statue, Bayeux

What Is Leadership?

- “*Leadership is about solving problems.*
The day your people stop bringing you their problems is the day that you have stopped leading them. They have either lost confidence that you can help or concluded that you do not care. *Either* is a failure of leadership.”
- “*Leadership is all about people.*
It is **not** about organizations. It is **not** about plans. It is **not** about strategies. It is all about people – motivating people to get the job done. You have to be people-centered.”



*General Colin Powell, Chairman,
Joint Chiefs of Staff,
Secretary of State, and Author of
It Worked for Me: In Life and
Leadership, and My American Journey*

What Is Leadership?

Army's definition of Leadership:

- “Leadership is the activity of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization.”
- “Leadership focuses and synchronizes organizations. Leaders inspire people to become energized and motivated to achieve the desired outcomes. It can be an assumed role or assigned responsibility.”

**Develop
a Personal
Leadership
Philosophy!**

3.

**How: Leadership Styles and
Archetypes (Patterns of Behavior)**

Leadership Styles



Autocratic:

Leader has *complete control* over all decisions.



Bureaucratic:

Leader uses *rigid rules* and a *strict division of labor*.



Coaching:

Leader focuses on *improving each employee's* strengths and weaknesses.



Charismatic:

Leader, through personality/charm, *unites/inspires team* around *goals and shared future*.



Democratic:

Leader *includes employees* in the decision-making process.



Laissez-faire:

Leader is *hands-off*, allows the team/groups to make decisions.



Pacesetter:

Leader inspires and influences team by being a *role model for values and behavior*.



Servant:

Leader prioritizes the *growth and well-being* of all employees.



Transactional:

Leader sets clear expectations and *rewards or punishes* based on performance.



Transformational:

Leader inspires and motivates and helps the team *grow/innovate/learn* (*fosters creativity*).



Visionary:

Creates a *compelling vision of the future* (likely blends with transformational).

Leadership Archetypes



Collaborator:

Empathetic, team-building, talent-spotting, coaching oriented.



Energizer:

Charismatic, inspiring, connects emotionally, provides meaning.



Pilot:

Strategic, visionary, adroit at managing complexity, open to input, team oriented.



Provider:

Action oriented, confident in own path or methodology, loyal to colleagues, driven to provide for others.



Harmonizer:

Reliable, quality-driven, execution-focused, creates positive and stable environments, inspires loyalty.



Forecaster:

Learning oriented, deeply knowledgeable, visionary, cautious in decision-making.



Producer:

Task-focused, results oriented, linear thinker, loyal to tradition.



Composer:

Independent, creative, problem-solving, decisive, self-reliant.

Find your Leadership Style / Feedback via the Harvard Business Review Assessment at <https://hbr.org/2015/06/assessment-whats-your-leadership-style>

4.

Critical Components of Successful Leadership

Critical Elements of Successful Leadership

- Integrity / Honesty
- Trust
- Purpose and Vision
- Influence
- Decisiveness /
Informed Decisions
- Flexibility / Resilience
- Self-awareness
- Empowerment / Delegation -
Accountability
- Communication
- Passion / Inspiration

Critical Elements of Successful Leadership

The Four “Constants”



Principled Counsel
(Character)



Mastery of the Law
(Competence)



Servant Leadership
(Care)



Stewardship
(Commitment)

5.

Top Ten Priorities for Effective Leaders



Top 10 Priorities for Effective Leaders

1. **Lead!**
2. **Develop Future Leaders (Mentorship!)**
3. **Be Leaders of Character (and raise your people to be the same)**
4. **Take Care of Your People**
5. **Just Fix ... Stuff**
6. **Develop Systems and Processes**
7. **Relationships: Create, Cultivate and Sustain**
8. **Coordinate & Inform**
9. **Develop and Model a Work-Life “Balance”
– Focus on Wellness of Self / Team**
10. **Energize and Motivate Your Team!
Have Fun!**

Top 10 Priorities for Effective Leaders

1. Lead! Old Army Maxim:

“When in charge, take charge!”

Folks are begging for your leadership; LBWA; Words Matter; Humility

2. Develop Future Leaders (Mentorship!)

Part of our Altria's Talent Management; Your Legacy; “In the Room”

3. Be Leaders of Character

Principled Lawyering; Be the “Honest Broker”; Demonstrate Moral Courage to do the *Right Thing*; Live your Core Values daily; Integrity; Lead by Example; “I’ll Meet you on the High Ground!”

4. Take Care of Your People

Know Your Crew, Love Your Crew – Servant Leadership; “We Few, We Happy Few...”

5. Just Fix... Stuff.

6. Develop Systems and Processes

Bad stuff happens, no matter how good you are; set tone: calming influence, steadying presence; “Handle Hard Better;” Response? Correct systems and processes in place?

7. Relationships: Create, Cultivate and Sustain

“Up, down, laterally, and in directions not realized, relationships matter;” Trusted Agents!

8. Coordinate and Communicate

Who else needs to know?

9. Develop and Model a Work-Life “Balance”

Find what works best for you/those you love; wellness of your team, family, and YOU

10. Inspire, Energize and Motivate Your Team!

Inspiration comes in many forms



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Leadership Training Vignettes / Case Studies

Small Group Leadership Vignette Discussions

Vignette #1

- **General Overview:** You have a ‘problematic’ employee who is actually an excellent worker. This employee works more quickly and accurately than any of your other employees, but talks too much, too loudly, occasionally makes off-color remarks, and verbally intimidates others at times. Most other employees appear to accept that this is just the way this employee is, but overall morale in the office is at an all-time low. If this difficult employee were to leave, everyone would be much happier, but efficiency would suffer significantly. Discuss (1) whether you would address these issues with the employee and (2) whether you would inform other employees about any actions you take.
- **Note:** Initially, discuss why you would or would not address the concern with the employee. If you do confront the employee, how would you do it (when / where / what would you say)?
- **Background Information:**
- You supervise a section of ten data input employees at Acme Corporation, where the work is high-volume and important—it requires speed and accuracy but can be tedious at times. You are proud of your section because they get their work done—employees who, for the most part, are in their first position after graduating high school.
- There is one problem, however. One employee, much faster and more accurate than all others, mastered the tasks more quickly and, as such, usually finishes the assigned work prior to the others. As the work is monotonous, you ordinarily allow conversations once assigned tasks are complete. However, this problem employee tends to talk incessantly, and quite often gets loud and obnoxious, especially when you are out of the office. The employee appears to enjoy verbally harassing and intimidating other employees, brags about outside romances, and mocks other employees’ manner of dress, speech, and appearance—to include sensitive matters like their weight, lack of dating partners, etc.
- While some of the employees are able to tune out this talkative employee, others still have difficulty dealing with this employee. All would agree that morale in the section is low. You are certain that if this employee were not present, other employees would be more content in their work.
- You have informally spoken with the employee a few times about these concerns, and the employee has responded appropriately for a day or two, but then returns to prior ways.
- **What should you do?**

Small Group Leadership Vignette Discussions

Vignette #2

- **General Overview:** Due to a cost-cutting reorganization within your company, a 31-year veteran employee is re-assigned to your department. This employee is extremely nice and well liked. In the first few weeks, this employee performs many of the new tasks appropriately, but struggles to understand and accomplish one particular task (note: none of your other employees struggle with this task). While this employee has made some progress in learning how to achieve the task over time, it is still taking too long in your estimation. To compound the problem, you believe this employee does not actually understand your instructions about the task, despite the fact that the employee repeatedly tells you otherwise.
- **Background Information:**
- You have been the supervisor of the claims adjustment department for a number of years. Although the work is often frustrating and difficult, you enjoy your job and your work—that is, until this new employee joined your team.
- Your company went through a cost-cutting reorganization a few months ago, and you inherited a 58-year-old employee, with 31 years in the company, whose position was cut in the realignment. While friendly and capable of performing the new job requirements, this employee cannot master a key task of the job—completing a case Assessment Form.
- You know that the Assessment Form is difficult to quickly master, taking other employees on average 3-5 weeks to learn. You initially walk this employee through the process as they take notes, nod, and ask no questions. Four days later, you receive a stack of Assessment Forms from the employee, which are poorly written and filled with errors. You carefully explain how to complete the Assessment Form again, as the employee listens intently, smiles and nods, and again asks no questions. Regardless, over the next two weeks, you continue to receive deficient Assessment Forms from the employee, and the number completed is well below what is expected per day. While the employee is getting better little by little, you wonder if the employee has a bad memory, and is possibly bluffing about understanding how to fill out the form.
- **How do you handle this matter?**

Small Group Leadership Vignette Discussions

Vignette #3

- **General Overview:** Your supervisor within your department always schedules short-notice team meetings, at inconsistent intervals, leaving no time for preparation. In the most recent short-notice meeting, the supervisor drops a bombshell and asks everyone to provide recommendations in an extremely short timeframe on how to reduce “red-tape” within the department. You tell the supervisor that everyone shares a greater concern that the supervisor's "VIP service" initiative is actually what is causing turmoil within the department. The supervisor curtly cuts you off with, “none of your proposals would work anyway,” and drives on with the hasty request. After that, despite significant coaxing from the supervisor, no one proposes any other ideas. Discuss the effectiveness of how both you and the supervisor handled the situation, and how to resolve each of the issues facing the department as a result.
- **Background Overview:**
- You have worked for your supervisor for almost one year, but still have not adapted to the last-minute team meetings the supervisor always schedules. You never know when they will happen, so you can never properly prepare. These meetings frustrate you, just as they do the other managers in the company. To no one's great surprise, another short-notice meeting was scheduled for late afternoon today, and no one had any idea of the topic.
- In this meeting, after receiving a brief update from all of the staff in the room, your supervisor announced a new initiative to resolve the “red-tape” problem within the department (his code-word for all of the detailed procedures that the supervisor believes team members followed too rigidly). The supervisor speaks about this topic at every meeting—a pet rock. This time, however, he states that this is “really serious,” and asks everyone to provide 2-3 written ideas by morning on how to reduce the red tape within the department.
- Feeling as if you cannot hold back any longer, you indicate that this a difficult task to meet on such short notice, as you already have a project that you will be working on late into the night—also assigned by your supervisor. You add that, if the department has an urgent problem to address, it is your supervisor's “VIP Service” Program, as it causes problems for all staff (requiring staff to drop what they are working on to address “VIP Service” issues, regardless of size or criticality, all in the name of providing the “best service possible”). While a noble gesture, you believe it is causing more errors and a greater lack of productivity, as staff are constantly interrupted in the midst of ongoing tasks.
- Your supervisor responds that you have “obviously not had much time working with the VIP Program yet,” and that “anything that you would propose would not work anyway.” The supervisor then asks for any further ideas or suggestions, but no one volunteers anything, and the meeting ends after 15 minutes of strained, reluctant discussion. Everyone leaves without saying another word.
- **What do you do now?**

An artistic illustration of three people standing on the peak of a dark, jagged mountain. They are silhouetted against a vibrant, colorful sky filled with swirling clouds in shades of blue, orange, yellow, and red. The people are holding hands, symbolizing unity and achievement.

“I’ll meet you on the high ground ...”