

Definitely Mabey

Attitude is everything when combatting stress in law firms

This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of the stress causing aspects in many law firms but rather a list of common ones:

- What you ask me to do does not align with what you compensate for – succession; business development; delegating work; developing lawyer skills; investing in the longer term; innovation; profitability; etc.
- You want the focus to be on client service but you keep chipping away at the pillars upon which the desired calibre of service is based upon – decreasing the number of legal assistants; ignoring legal process mapping; sticking to the billable hour; etc.
- The shared vision of where the firm is headed is only shared among a few – lack of transparency in decisions made; lack of consultation with partners; historic partnership versus a centrally managed one; etc.
- The valuation of each partner's contribution is not a transparent one – the ratio between the highest paid and the lowest paid partner is growing; baby boomers protecting their incomes versus bringing younger partners along financially (in part because that is how they were treated); I am okay with my compensation but Sally or Joe should not make as much or more than me; etc.
- I didn't have anything else to do after undergraduate so why not go into the practice of law as I can always go do something else later – the ever-increasing number of lawyers who are in private practice and really want to be any place else but they are hooked on the money; or have low self-esteem so cannot see themselves doing something else; dual professionals seeking work-life balance; etc.
- I know, you know, I know I am not performing up to your expectations of a partner and do you think I am happy about it? – determining who is an underperforming partner and there but by the grace of God so let's complain about them but I am not going to deal with them, after all they are my partner; the firm is unfair, I always worked for other lawyers and their clients and, as long as I did good work, I had plenty of work so no one pushed me to develop my own client base; I am not the problem it's that the firm has too many associates doing the work I use to do and there are too many staff and overhead is too high; etc.



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Principal & Managing Director

Before tackling some stress reducing/avoidance techniques, lawyers have to accept there will always be stress in their firms especially given the incomes anticipated and earned by them.

To think otherwise is to ignore reality. If you don't accept this simple reality then stop reading and continue pursuing that pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

Two underlying premises going forward:

- Not all stress is bad and in fact it has been known to enhance focus and resulting performance; and,
- If you carry your stress with you all of the time, it will become so heavy you won't be able to carry on functionally.

"If you carry your stress with you all of the time, it will become so heavy you won't be able to carry on...."

The following thoughts did not originate with me but rather were lessons learned, more often than not the hard way, by watching others handle stress brilliantly. And of course it goes without saying there is no rocket science to them:

- Always keep your words soft and friendly just in case you have to eat them;
- If you can't be kind at least have the decency to be vague;
- Some mistakes are too much fun to only make once;
- If you lend someone money and never see them again it was probably worth it;
- Drive carefully. It's not only cars that can be recalled by their maker (I expect those familiar with my driving record see great irony in this one);
- Never put both feet in your mouth at the same time because you won't have a leg to stand on; and,
- We could learn a lot from crayons... some are sharp, some are pretty, some are dull, some have weird names, and all are different colours, but they all have to live in the same box.

"Adopting the right attitude can convert a negative stress into a positive one."

As Andrew Bernstein is attributed to having said, *"The truth is that stress doesn't come from your boss, your kids, your spouse, traffic jams, health challenges, or other circumstances. It comes from your thoughts about these circumstances."* As corny as it sounds when you say it out loud, attitude is everything. Adopting the right attitude can convert a negative stress into a positive one.

So make your attitude worth emulating and you will make your firm a better place no matter the

challenges it faces.

I would be remiss if I didn't end with a holiday toast to all, irrespective of your reason for celebrating this time of year, may you and yours truly experience peace and happiness and all the best in 2015.

Until next time our paths cross,
remember,

"life is a mystery to be explored and
not a problem to be solved!"

Comments or Questions?

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