

# The Ultimate Partnership Planning Questionnaire

## *Part Four: How can I be a successful partner?*

You've made it! Now, how do you succeed as a partner?

Begin by maintaining a strong network. Lawyers who become and remain a partner have developed and continue to nurture a large, quality network of colleagues, experts, clients, and friends. These lawyers can call upon their network to connect clients with resources, to make referrals, and to keep abreast of developments within the industries related to their practice areas.

1) Every lawyer should join one organization within each of the following areas: professional, service-oriented, and social. At a minimum, every lawyer should be closely involved with a bar association in order to develop relationships within the profession.

Consider the following:

- How many organizations have you joined that are outside of the law firm?
- In what ways are you involved in those organizations?
- How often do you attend meetings?
- How much time do you have to apply to building and nurturing your network?
- What are the roadblocks for you?

Next consider your value to the firm. Your firm's partnership agreement may specify the ways in which compensation is allocated every year. Nevertheless, it is worth reviewing the following questions annually to prepare for the partner compensation process and to do your own professional development assessment.

2(a) What have you done in the past twelve months to justify an increase in your hourly rate? This is a tough question that you need to answer honestly to yourself.

- Have you gained expertise in a new area?
- Have you developed your profile such that you are recognized in the Bar and in the business community as the go-to person in a particular area?
- Have you developed expertise in an emerging practice area where there is no pressure on fees because there are few experts?

2(b) What have you done in the past twelve months to increase the profitability of your group, your office, or your firm? There are five levers of profitability at play.

- Have you worked harder this year than last – more billable hours?
- Have you increased your leverage by adding one or two associates to your team and kept them busy with new and interesting work?
- Have you developed your expertise or the expertise of your group thereby increasing your overall rate for the work you do?
- Have you increased your margin – perhaps you found ways of being more efficient while managing your costs?
- Have you improved the efficiency of your practice? Do you get your time in daily? Do you bill clients regularly? Are you realizing a greater percentage of your time at the point of billing? Are you effective in collecting your accounts?

2(c) What have you done in the past twelve months to develop the young lawyers in your group, office, or firm? Associates the world over tell us that one of the many reasons they leave a law firm is the lack of a relationship with partners, usually stemming from poor communication. Help your firm to retain talented associates by keeping in touch with them.

- Have you developed resources for your group so that new lawyers and their mentors know what types of work associates should be assigned and what stretch engagements they should aspire to?
- Are you a mentor? What specific things have you done to support and train the new lawyers whom you are guiding?
- Have you learned to give feedback that is informal, timely, and appropriate?  Have you asked for feedback from the associates to see how you might help them in ways that are meaningful?

2(d) What have you done in the past twelve months to improve your profile?

- Can you identify your target clients?
- What do your target clients read? If you are a junior lawyer your internal firm publications will be read by the partners you serve as well as the firm's clients. Writing leads to speaking – speaking leads to a perception of expertise – perception of expertise leads to work. If you are not a good writer (not everyone is)

you can collaborate with someone who writes well and work together on a publication.

Do you have a profile on social networks?

2(e) What have you done in the past twelve months to improve the quality of the client service that you provide?

How many clients have you interviewed in the past twelve months to find out how they define quality?

Do you get the last 20% of your client work done in a timely fashion so as to build your business?

Do you get reporting letters done, final accounts done, and cash collected on a timely basis?

2(f) What have you done in the past twelve months to cross sell your expertise to others in your firm? Cross selling is an active process.

Have you built relationships with your colleagues so that they will think of you and want to work with you?

Have you shared your expertise with your colleagues and identified firm clients who might benefit from your expertise?

2(g) What have you done in the past twelve months to contribute to the group, the office or the firm? For some of you this might mean a leadership role, a mentoring role, or a marketing or business development role. Participation in a firm requires leadership. It also requires “followership”.

Have you been a supporter and contributor to positive change in your firm or do you get in the way of change?

How have you exhibited leadership within the firm?

What have you done to contribute to and support the firm’s goals?

2(h) What have you done in the past twelve months to get to know a colleague better? Working in a group can be challenging, particularly when the group members are highly intelligent, fiercely independent, and extremely driven.

Do you lunch with your colleagues from time to time, particularly colleagues whom you don’t know well or don’t think you like much?

Do you know what your colleagues’ interests are outside the office – what music they like – what charities they work for – who their heroes are?

2(i) What have you done in the past twelve months to improve your personal communication skills?

In the words of Toronto master coach John Plank, “Your academic accomplishments, your professional training, and your experience combine to make you a highly competent professional. Yet, your highest level of success will be determined by your ability to communicate your professional expertise to colleagues and clients”.

- How have you improved your efficiency and competence using technology?
- Have you asked a communications professional to give you feedback on your presentation style?
- Have you taken a course on speaking to the media?
- What have you done to improve your communications with colleagues, referral sources, and clients?

We hope that these questions have given you an opportunity to reflect, plan, and foster your continued success. We wish you every success as you continue to build your practice and your firm.

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