

Recommended Reading for Law Firm Leaders

I recommend the following reading for any new or longtime managing partner, Executive Committee member, practice group leader, Executive Director or future leader. Top five recommendations are marked with a star (★). The referenced articles by Altman Weil consultants are available at our website, altmanweil.com. —Eric A. Seeger

Leadership and Management

★ *The Effective Executive* (1966) by Peter Drucker

Powerful and enduring. This essential leadership reference includes chapters on “making strength productive” and “the elements of decision-making” as well as time management. The one thing to read if you’re reading only one. Drucker’s *Managing for Results* (1986) is also outstanding, with timeless observations and recommendations.

Good to Great (2001) by Jim Collins

Based on rigorous research of public companies, Collins set forth then-counterintuitive explanations for why some companies consistently outperformed their peers and the market. A number of his team’s findings have made their way into our everyday business vernacular. The findings on “Level 5 Leadership,” people issues (“First Who ... Then What”), confronting brutal facts and instilling organizational discipline are particularly useful.

Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion (1984) by Robert Cialdini

Collaboration among highly autonomous partners is essential and still too rare. Learn the six psychological secrets behind people’s powerful impulse to comply, how to put them to work on your behalf and how to defend against them. Entertaining and useful on many levels.

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People (1989) by Stephen Covey

After reading and re-reading this book, the three-day 7 Habits Personal Effective Workshop I attended as a middle manager in 1993 was truly life-changing. One of the bestselling books of all time. Light on the importance of effective spiritual habits but strong on everything else.

★ “Management Time: Who’s Got the Monkey?” by William Oncken, Jr. and Donald L. Wass, in *Harvard Business Review* (Nov/Dec 1974)

Maximize your discretionary time by not allowing other people’s monkeys to jump onto your back for care and feeding. A lesson in delegation and establishing and maintaining effective boundaries at work. One of HBR’s bestselling reprints.

“Leadership That Gets Results” by Daniel Goleman, in *Harvard Business Review* (March 2000)

Goleman, author of the acclaimed *Emotional Intelligence* books, discusses six common leadership styles and how they tend to be received by others. The most effective leaders use multiple styles and know when to use each one.

Law Firm Leadership

★ *Managing the Professional Service Firm* (1993) by David Maister

Required reading for anyone involved in managing and leading a law firm. Includes fundamental insights about managing professionals, financial performance, strategy, compensation and selling.

“Leading Leaders (by Jeswald Salacuse): A Book Review” by Leslie Johnston, *Business Book Review* (Vol. 23, No. 10, 2006)

How can one exert leadership influence over peers who may be smarter, older and more powerful than oneself? An excellent book review — no need to read the whole book.

★ *Law Firms in Transition Survey* and *Chief Legal Officer Survey* by Altman Weil, Inc.

Altman Weil’s annual *Law Firms in Transition Survey* documents the market forces that are reshaping the competitive legal landscape and opines on how law firm leaders can find competitive advantages in a redefined marketplace. Our annual *Chief Legal Officer Survey* provides insights into the current thinking and future intentions of in-house law department leaders. Download the surveys free of charge at altmanweil.com.

★ “What Are the Obligations of Partners?” by Thomas S. Clay, Principal, Altman Weil

The requirements of law firm ownership have become more stringent and more important than ever before. Clearly defining partners’ obligations to the firm and each other, judging whether each partner is living up to those obligations, and holding each partner accountable are critical to the financial and cultural success of any law firm. Altman Weil’s most influential and most-requested article.

“Calculating Profitability” by James D. Cotterman, Principal, Altman Weil

Not all revenue in a law firm is equally valuable. Jim explains why and how to calculate profitability so that better decisions can be reached on how the firm prices, manages and delivers legal services and which practices deserve disproportionate investment. Calculating profitability is now; compensating it is next.

“Tips for Effective Law Firm Planning” by Eric A. Seeger, Principal, Altman Weil

A broad overview of the planning process and the hallmarks of an effective plan. See also our extensive materials on practice group planning, practice leadership, merger and growth at altmanweil.com.

“Law Firm Succession Planning: Do One Simple Thing” by Alan R. Olson, Principal, Altman Weil

Most firms in our experience are still not doing everything they should to effectively manage senior lawyer transitions and client retention. Alan provides practical advice for dealing with this huge issue in the profession.

“Five Things Associates Tell Me (That They Don’t Tell You)” by Eric A. Seeger, Principal, Altman Weil

There’s a good chance your associates are not clear where the firm is going, how to make partner or whether equity partnership is desirable. They don’t think they get enough training and are frustrated that extraordinary performance does not always

generate extraordinary rewards. If your current associates are your future partners, it's important to understand and attend to their concerns.

Execution

The 4 Disciplines of Execution (2012) by Chris McChesney and Sean Covey

Sets forth a practical framework for moving beyond mere goals and action steps to include constructive record keeping and regular, focused conversations about whether the actions are actually taking place and are causing achievement of goals. Discusses how to create real accountability, which is so often lacking in a law firm environment.

The Knowing-Doing Gap (2000) by Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert Sutton

Talk is cheap and knowing what to do does not, in itself, accomplish anything. Something has to get done and somebody has to do it. Good strategy as the radical implementation of common sense.

Getting Things Done (2001) by David Allen

A tactical manual for uncluttering your brain, setting priorities, using your scheduling tools effectively and gaining control of your time. Breakthrough methods for stress-free performance.

Execution (2002) by Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan

What separates successful organizations from their less successful competitors is the ability to link people, strategy and operations in a culture of execution. Practical advice for managing for results.

Change and Change Management

The End of Lawyers? (2008) by Richard Susskind

Susskind explains and predicts how the forces of technology and commoditization will affect the need for, selection, delivery and consumption of legal services. He sees the future; the question is pace. This book is a hard slog at times but worth the effort. If this one resonates, move on to its sequels.

Leading Change (1996) by John Kotter

Of particular interest is the author's discussion of why and how to create and sustain a sense of urgency in an organization. Generating lasting change requires a shared understanding of why change is needed and a shared sense of urgency to make it happen. Kotter's *A Sense of Urgency* (2008) and *Accelerate* (2014) are worthy follow-ups.

Managing Transitions (1991) by William Bridges

The hardest part of change is not envisioning what comes next, but letting go of what went before. Bridges discusses the personal/emotional elements of organizational change and how to deal with them successfully.

Firm Culture

The No Asshole Rule (2007) by Robert I. Sutton

Pardon his French. For the rule to be effective, it has to be a hard rule, not a guideline, general principle, hope or expectation. His bit about calculating your firm's TCA (Total Cost of Assholes) may change your mind about whether the revenue those partners generate is really worth it. If you think you may need this book, you need it right away.

"Establishing Core Values in Your Law Firm" by Eric A. Seeger

How and why to define a set of mutual expectations in terms of contribution, behavior and character that all partners agree to promote, embody and uphold. Too many organizations have core values that are mere platitudes, neither core nor valuable. Why a rigorous commitment to clearly stated core values makes good business sense. Warning: Defining your firm's core values and failing to enforce them is worse than not defining them at all.