



Designing Your Practice: The Missing Element

TONY PELUSI, JR. J.D., CPCC



SYNOPSIS

Interpersonal conflicts are a natural part of every business culture, and it's wise to plan for these conflicts in your law practice before they arise. To maximize the power of interpersonal relationships, you need to do two things: resolve conflict and build trust. Associates should be tolerant of each other's views, with agreed-upon metaskills used in all interactions.

For a comprehensive overview of the practical concerns, problems, and issues you might encounter in setting up and/or running a law practice, visit LOMAP. But realize that any practice design wouldn't be complete without one more element—an element that can make the difference between success and failure, satisfaction and disappointment: designing your interpersonal and team relationships.

Just as with finance, operations, and technology, relationships are critical to successfully managing your practice. And they can be managed. How do team members behave when things get tough? What can individuals responsible for? What will your corporate culture be like: nose-to-the-grindstone, or flexible and enjoyable? Will the culture be competitive, adversarial, collaborative, or perhaps conciliatory? With a strategic approach, you can actually create the right relationships that best support your ongoing success.

TIP

Teams who consciously create agreements experience more positive relationships – and they achieve goals more quickly and easily.

RELATIONSHIPS: PLANNING THE COURSE

Since our lives depend on relationships, learning to plan how they develop is extremely beneficial. Here I want to focus on both professional and personal relationships. Professional relationships are mostly those in the workplace (e.g., colleagues, management, vendors) and those you work with (e.g., clients, attorneys, office and court personnel). And of course, personal relationships revolve around family, friends, community, and the like.

RELATIONSHIPS: SETTING THE CONTEXT

Since our lives depend on relationships, setting the context for how they develop is extremely beneficial. This is true for both professional and personal relationships. Professional relationships are mostly those in the workplace (e.g., colleagues, managers, support staff, and vendors) and those you work with (e.g., clients, other attorneys, and court personnel). And of course, personal relationships revolve around family, friends, community, and the like.

THE THIRD ENTITY™: THE SPACE BETWEEN

Relationships are more than the sum of people you interact with. They also involve the third entity™— that space the relationship occupies, and the voice of that system. To illustrate this concept, think about the last time you were at a cocktail party or networking event. At some point during a conversation, a new person joined in. Notice the shift? That change in dynamics was a change in the third entity™. In your career, the nature of the third entity™ and its resulting behavior, emotional field, and energy should be consciously managed. If it's not, studies prove that it will develop haphazardly on its own. With even a little attention to the third entity™, you can create significant positive changes.

SETTING THE STAGE: CHANGING PERCEPTIONS

Planning and maximizing relationships starts with changing perceptions. The process begins with an honest, open, and willing dialogue about goals, wants, needs, roles, and responsibilities. Participants who purposefully design relationships agree on how

they'll interact, communicate, and hold each other accountable. No relationship will be conflict-free (and that's a good thing—really); it will become increasingly rewarding as the awareness of those who populate it increases. Those involved will understand that there are agreed-upon ways of behaving, even with individuals taking specific roles such as leader, assistant, naysayer, facilitator, change agent, etc. Each individual will come to understand first-hand that the successful resolution of conflict is one of the best ways to build trust on a team.

TOOLS: WAYS TO GET RESULTS

There are several skills and strategic, tactical tools that will help you achieve the desired results for your firm. While an Organization & System Relationship Coach (ORSC®) can train your team on a wide variety of skills, there are some tools you can develop on your own, such as metaskills.

METASKILLS: MAXIMIZING RELATIONSHIPS

Deep democracy maintains that all the voices and aspects of self, other, and relationship must be heard. This metaskill is based in a

profound tolerance that appreciates even the most unpopular views, which must be given voice in order to achieve the full potential of relationships, and for the sum to surpass the total of the parts. The other fundamental metaskill is inquiry/awareness – the expansive practice of open-mindedness. This fluid process values the wisdom gained from all experience and is best practiced without regard to outcome.

How do you put metaskills to work for you? Simply introduce them to the others on your team, come to a shared understanding of what they mean in your relationship, and agree that these metaskills will be used in all interactions. You'll also need to come to a shared understanding of how to hold each other accountable if there's a lapse in judgment.

Metaskills are only one method used to plan, organize, and maximize the power of relationships. When you consciously bring tools like these into any relationship, you've opened the door to increased positivity and productivity. Enjoy the benefits you create!

Tony Pelusi, J.D. is a Lawyer/Coach/Facilitator. Pelusi brings to bear his experiences as an attorney, entrepreneur, criminal prosecutor, criminal defense counsel, and civil litigator to help law firms and other businesses realize the full potential of their teams and team members.