

# CHAPTER 1

## SUCCESS BEGINS WITH YOU

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

*To laugh often and much;  
to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection  
of children;  
to earn the appreciation of honest critics  
and endure the betrayal of false friends.  
To appreciate beauty;  
to find the best in others; to leave the world  
a bit better  
whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or  
a redeemed social condition;  
to know that even  
one life has breathed easier because you have lived.  
This is to have succeeded.*

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

The success of a law firm is predicated on four factors:

1. the personal qualities and characteristics of its people;
2. the ability to attract clients;
3. the ability to deliver high-quality legal services efficiently; and
4. the ability to anticipate change and adapt to it. This book discusses all these factors.

### 1.2 10 CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE

Successful people all share certain characteristics. The mix is often different, but the characteristics are always the same.

#### A. PASSION

Successful people are passionate about what they do — passionate in their relationships and passionate in their professional lives. Lawyers, to be successful, need to love practicing law and the area of law on which they are concentrating. Success requires hard work—a lot of energy and a commitment of time and money. Lawyers who love their work do not mind this. A lawyer who does not love his or her specialty should consider a change. If work is just a job, not a passion, it is hard to be successful.

## **PROFITABLE LAW FIRM MANAGEMENT**

### **B. VISION**

Everyone needs a vision for the future. People need to set goals. They need to know what they want to achieve. That is their dream. Once an individual establishes a dream, the strategies necessary to achieve it can be developed, but the dream is the starting point. Carl Sandberg said, “Nothing happens but first a dream.”

### **C. IMAGINATION**

In the legal profession, many lawyers are completely absorbed with the file on their desk. They usually do a great job on that file from beginning to end and their client is satisfied when the matter is completed but they never pick up their heads to see what else is going on in the law firm or in the world. There is a fine line, however, between a niche and a rut, and thus it is important to look around, try new things, and make changes.

Some people make incremental changes; they are constantly looking for better ways to do things. Others are more adventuresome. They take what they are doing, blow it up, and start all over again. They change areas within the profession or leave the profession and start again.

It is often difficult, however, for practicing attorneys in the conservative field of law to take such measures. Tom Peters, one of the nation’s foremost business consultants and authors, talks about the need for every organization to have a Chief Destruction Officer (CDO). This person is responsible for reshaping the organization regularly to keep up with the rapidly changing world. People who make incremental changes tend to be managers. People who blow up organizations and make quantum leaps tend to be entrepreneurs.

### **D. PERSEVERANCE**

What separates many people at the top from the rest of the group is perseverance. Many people set a goal, get started, and give up as soon as they hit the first obstacle. To make major changes, it is necessary to overcome a lot of obstacles. Take them one at a time, but never, ever give up. Thomas Edison said, “Genius is one percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration.”

### **E. INTELLIGENCE**

Success in the legal profession requires a certain level of intelligence. Without it, it is difficult to understand what needs to be done and to *do* it. As people’s IQs rise beyond a certain point, their chances of success increase, but not dramatically. Everyone who reads this book has enough intelligence to be successful. Generally, everyone who reads this book graduated from law school or holds a management position at a law firm and has above-average intelligence. However, the smartest person is not necessarily the most successful person. Some brilliant people do not have common sense or lack commitment to their chosen profession.

### **F. CHARISMA**

Dale Carnegie said that 85 percent of what people achieve in life is the result of personality, and 15 percent we achieve because of our knowledge. So many things depend on charisma. A client has to trust a lawyer in order to retain the lawyer and follow the lawyer’s advice. The staff has to believe in the lawyer to follow the lawyer’s vision with respect to the management of the firm and the performance of daily tasks. Referral sources have to be developed, and this is often accomplished

more by personality than by knowledge. While interpersonal skills can be developed, successful people usually have charismatic personalities.

**G. ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS**

Some people have excellent organizational skills, but most do not. Fortunately, these can be acquired. In order to give the level of client service demanded and to accomplish everything that needs to be accomplished in a day, organizational skills are imperative. Everyone is given 24 hours every day, but some people get a lot more out of the 24 hours than others. (*See Chapter 5 for a discussion of effective time management.*)

**H. WORK ETHIC**

A good work ethic means getting to the office early in the morning and attacking the task at hand. It is a discipline that can be acquired. People who have *jobs* work from nine to five; people who have *careers* work on projects. Projects create goals, are exciting, and make a difference. People with good work ethics are not focused on time but on the task at hand. They are not concerned about the clock; they are concerned about finishing what they started. Passion plays a role here. If someone loves what he or she is doing, a good work ethic is easy. If not, developing a good work ethic is impossible. Your work ethic will emanate to others around you and your staff will learn your work ethic.

**I. ENERGY**

There's an old saying: "If you want to get something done, give it to a busy person." The reason is that busy people have high energy and get things done. They do not put things off, and will always take on another project. High energy requires living a good lifestyle with plenty of rest and physical exercise.

**J. INTEGRITY**

The best marketing is word-of-mouth, and a reputation for integrity is crucial to success. Successful people build good reputations for integrity. They are scrupulously honest with their clients and themselves. They put their clients' interests first. This is not only good ethics — it is good business.

**1.3 EXPANDING HORIZONS**

**A. THINKING OUTSIDE OF THE BOX**

Successful people are creative and are constantly looking for new ideas. Average lawyers go to a few continuing education programs to learn substantive law and work diligently on the files on their desks. However, they rarely look up and around and seek out fresh ideas. The legal profession is changing rapidly and the pace of change will leave these people behind.

Law is a profession, but it is also a business. Lawyers therefore need to think like business people. There are a number of business authors whose messages can have a great impact on your business skills.