

YLS President's Column

By Chris Wirken

September 2009

Leadership

I was given a very unique and wonderful opportunity in this legal community by growing up and working with my father, Jim Wirken (who also served as YLS President and KCMBA President, amongst an expanse of other leadership positions). Dad's lessons, reputation, and involvement have clearly enabled me to become the lawyer and leader that I am today. Most of you reading this also probably recognize Jim's tendency for idioms and sayings to simplify and present ideas. Therefore, it is only fitting to present several idioms and sayings to aid our association, leaders and non-leaders, in key points to consider about Leadership:

Who do you serve / who are you here for?

A leader in the KCMBA is here for the Association and its mission for professional and public service. I find it destructive to find agendas co-mingled or wrongly incorporated within a group. Leadership should serve the group led, not other priorities of self, friends, finances, politics, religion, environmentalism, etc. I don't want to hear issues on immigration, the environment or politics in my church, I want religion. I don't expect KCMBA to advocate a religion or a political platform onto me, just legal professionalism. To speak on behalf of KCMBA, the speaker is reflecting upon the members of KCMBA and should avoid speaking upon issues that are not the clear opinion or position of the KCMBA or the majority of its members. If your priorities or aim require speaking out in ways other than serving KCMBA, than find the organization that pursues your differing priority and lead them instead.

What do we have to give?

We as lawyers have the unique opportunity to provide legal aide to persons or groups in need. We as lawyers are NOT situated to provide medical care and doctors certainly should not be providing legal aide. KCMBA makes sure that what we do is legally relevant so that we don't spend our limited time and resources on matters at the expense of matters which only we can address. We don't need to compete with Harvesters, the Red Cross, and such, but we might find great and creative ways to work with them in legally relevant ways. Otherwise, we often times leave the work to the professionals when the relevant profession is not law.

Lead, Follow or Get Out Of The Way!

As a voluntary association, our success stems directly from the fruits of our volunteers. I've watched many leaders squander their resources or actually cost themselves success or effectiveness by actually hindering, deterring or disrespecting volunteers. Don't restrain eager and energetic volunteers, guide them in the right direction and get out of their way. Give them the aide, credit and spotlight they need and deserve or don't expect more of the same from them.

Keep it Simple

Never forget that we all have jobs that require our time and attention. We have families we'd like to provide for and keep. We don't have an endless supply of hours and energy for volunteering. Get things done. Don't belabor issues. Dragging an issue on fatigues your volunteers until the situation is stagnant and no longer encourages volunteer involvement, but actually sends volunteers elsewhere. This is certainly an area where I think that the KCMBA application of Robert's Rules of Order can greatly aid the progress of matters and avoids the paralysis of analysis: put it to a vote and move on.



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Another way to keep things simple is to confirm the scope of persons involved in communications and don't over-publish information, particularly over copying email. Don't leave pages of extra text on the bottom of an ongoing email chain. Be careful and cautious to use the "Reply All" command, particularly if there is anything less than pleasant to the message. Picking up the phone will also be a lot faster and better means of communication than making someone type everything out and cover every way that the lack of a tone of voice can cause a message to be distorted and situations to get off track.

Offer proactive thoughts, not just criticism

One sure way to get nothing done or hamstringing your efforts is to shoot down and criticize ideas while failing to provide actual good ideas or instruction on how to get something done. Be pro-active and positive.

Give/Take the Time Needed

If you're going to do something (like lead our or aide our Association), do it right. If you don't have the time or skill, get help or delegate. You don't know it all, you can't do it all. Our strength is in our diversity, vast experience and numbers.

If I had to summarize my primary goal as the YLS President this year, it would be "Don't screw it up". This group is so capable, qualified and driven that the year flew by with ease and no big drama even though some big changes were occurring. Who could ask for more?

Be nice

This one really needs to be the first and greatest point, but seems to be the most widely ignored. Many of us practice in litigation, defining our duties by the adversarial situation. The most respected of our profession maintain courtesy, civility and professionalism in the face of these situations. This is the element of this profession in this metro area that really gives me my drive to volunteer with KCMBA and becomes my fundamental effort when given a chance to lead. I'd hate to know how things would be without it and commend all of you staying true to the same.