

frequently asked questions about
Walker Clark Leadership Counseling



What is leadership counseling?

Leadership counseling is a development process, not an event. It helps law firm leaders to learn and to change behaviors, usually over a period of four to six months. It focuses on solving real-life problems and making decisions. It provides an opportunity for:

- ★ professional feedback
- ★ self reflection and deeper thinking
- ★ encouragement during times of change
- ★ learning of practical techniques and skills
- ★ guidance through difficult situations

Leadership counseling is not about changing personalities. Personalities are not inherently good or bad. It is the choices that leaders make in their actions that most often determine their effectiveness.

It's not a "one size fits all" solution to leadership problems. Every law firm is unique; and the challenges facing individual partners are shaped by many factors.

Why should I consider leadership counseling?

For good or for ill, every partner in a law firm is a leader.

No partner can hide. Nobody gets a “0” on a leadership scale. The “score” might be a positive number or a negative number; but it’s never “0.”

Of course, responsibilities are shaped by the job you perform. However, every partner, directly or indirectly, influences the culture of the firm, the performance of junior lawyers and staff, and the ultimate success of the firm and its people.

Every partner has leadership potential. Not every managing partner or practice group head will become a great leader; but everyone can learn skills to become a better leader.

A commitment to improving leadership skills and a willingness to learn -- or in some cases, to relearn -- better habits, pay off.

Balanced people make balanced leaders. Leaders who invest in their own development are not as likely to become impatient, overly discouraged, or pessimistic about problems with clients, colleagues and staff. They are less likely to react negatively to criticism; and their actions are more likely to be constructive and proportionate to any given situation.

Lawyers who participate in leadership counseling become better at goal setting and goal achievement. They report more meaningful relationships, higher professional satisfaction, and less “distress.”

What does leadership counseling actually involve?

Through various forms of support, guidance, and feedback, partners are able to:

★ **Increase their self-awareness.**

Most lawyers have tremendous self confidence in their technical abilities. However, they are sometimes less mindful of what their strengths and limitations are as law firm leaders. This “blind spot” about their own abilities and how others perceive them in the workplace can minimize their positive impact in the firm.

With increased awareness partners can also develop a better understanding of what motivates them, how they learn, how they react emotionally to certain workplace triggers, and how the choices they make about their behavior impact their own success and that of others.

★ **Clarify where they need to improve.**

People have the right and responsibility to make choices about what, if any, behaviors they want to change.

Partners examine the consequences of continuing current practices as well as the potential benefits of changing.

★ **Commit to the achievement of certain goals in a specified period of time.**

This is a development process, which usually occurs over a period of four to six months. Meetings are face-to-face and by telephone.

The goals that are developed are unique to each person. The focus is usually on the present and the future, rather than the past.

- ★ **Develop new models for thinking about and experiencing relationships with others.**

For example, in some cases, partners may not be aware of how feelings are formed in response to thoughts. Behavior that they consider to be part of their personalities can actually be altered by the choices that they make.

- ★ **Develop specific skills to change or improve their behavior.**

Even when they understand the need to change their behavior, some law firm leaders may not know how to change.

The counseling process provides a learning structure, practice, and feedback. The applied learning and motivation to move ahead come from the partner.

- ★ **Make informed choices about their careers.**

Partners are sometimes unaware of their career options, within and outside of the firm. The counseling process can help them investigate these alternatives.

What about confidentiality?

Clear parameters of confidentiality are agreed, in advance, both with the law firm and the partner or partners involved in a leadership counseling process.

How can I justify this investment to my partners?

Effective business leaders understand the link between leadership skills, professional success, and the long term performance of a law firm.

Lawyers have specific challenges because of the unique environment in which they practice, the professional values that influence their thinking, and the personalities of professionals who are often attracted to the practice of law.

The financial and professional stakes are high. Law firm leaders contribute revenue to the firm and manage changing, often unpredictable client relationships. Colleagues and staff depend on them to:

- ★ Create a motivating workplace.
- ★ Stay focused and provide direction.
- ★ Explain what each person must do to enable the firm to deliver the business plan.
- ★ Make sure that the important functions get done and avoid duplication of effort.
- ★ Engage in the “gentle push” when necessary to achieve shared goals.
- ★ Explain how day-to-day business activities relate to the long-term goals of the firm
- ★ Build consensus and resolve disagreements.
- ★ Understand the factors that determine the firm’s business success and communicate that information to people at all levels in the firm.

Leaders must find effective ways to stay on course in a dynamic, increasingly competitive, professional climate.

As lawyers become more successful, the demands on their time and energy increase. These conditions can leave them feeling mentally and physically depleted, distracted, and pessimistic. It can also become harder to achieve a sense of balance, manage time, and focus on priorities.

Chronic feelings of imbalance and workaholic behaviors can lead to serious problems for the law firm leader and the firm. Negative stress or “distress” may cause partners to behave in unproductive and even destructive ways. At the same time, positive stress can help increase focus, productivity and professional satisfaction.

Leaders need the opportunity to develop new leadership skills as the law firm evolves. Leaders must respond to increasingly diverse expectations from colleagues, while negotiating the cultures of international business organizations whom they serve. To fulfill their responsibility for implementing new ideas, they need leadership strategies that work.

It's a matter of choice. Law firm leaders must make conscious choices to take care of themselves and to keep themselves performing at their best. They know that they will not be able to achieve their goals and lead others to success if they don't invest in their own development and emotional well-being.

How do I know if leadership counseling is for me?

Leadership counseling requires motivation and readiness.

- ★ **Do you have a desire to improve** yourself, by working on a problem that you want to solve or by taking your leadership skills to the next level?
- ★ **Are you ready to identify new ways** to improve your leadership performance?
- ★ **Are you willing to commit** your time and effort to an individualized learning process directed at improving your leadership performance?
- ★ **Do you believe in your ability** to change?

If your answer to these four questions is yes, you may benefit from this development process.

To explore whether Walker Clark leadership counseling is right for you, please contact Lisa M. Walker Johnson by e-mail at lwalkerjohnson@walkerclark.com or by telephone at +1.239.466.8370 or +1.305.439.1787.