



Law Society
of Ontario

Barreau
de l'Ontario

Women's Resource Centre

Guide to leadership in law firms

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INTRODUCTION

The Law Society's Justicia Project originally developed this guide for law firms and women lawyers to be able to discuss the value of women's leadership and identify several practical strategies for supporting women leaders. This updated version is meant to be a tool for all women lawyers and paralegals who want to be leaders in law firms, or who already are leaders and want to learn how to be more effective. The strategies outlined are designed to be implemented in firms of varying sizes.

Inspirational quotes from colleagues

What follows are some thoughts from your colleagues on the importance of women's leadership in the legal profession:

"What do women bring? Women bring half the population, half the brains, half the talent, half the energy, half the ideas in the world. It's important that women leaders are in the law in the same way it's important to have women in any profession or any vocation or any human activity - because if you don't have women in there you are shortchanging yourself by half the population's skills, ability, brains, innovative capacity, just plain fun to be around. You're destroying your community. You're destroying your community of professionals if you don't have women as part of it."

Susan Ursel, Partner, Ursel Phillips Fellows Hopkinson LLP – Toronto, ON

"I think it benefits the profession, the business world, the people that work for law firms, not just lawyers but the non-lawyer staff, to have diversity in leadership because you get a much healthier, more open discussion about what's important and whether there is a different way of approaching an issue – and for that diversity you need more women."

Anne Kennedy, Partner, Risk and Practice Management, Pallett Valo LLP – Mississauga, ON

"I've certainly witnessed a change in the attitudes of clients. Now, an awful lot of women end up going in-house in companies, financial institutions, insurance companies, et cetera, and so they are around the boardroom table negotiating deals. So when they have to go home for a certain event or a reason, people understand that; and when the lawyer on the team has to go home, they also understand that. It's expected that people will be more sensitive about other demands. As long as you get your work done, it doesn't have to be done as visibly as it used to be done where you all had to be there in your three-piece suit until ten o'clock at night. So there have been changes in the attitudes of clients. The make-up of clients has changed. The clients themselves, the large institutional clients, have the same pressures that we have in keeping their female workforce. They have a lot of investment in women, and they don't want to lose it. So you have to adapt."

Sheila R. Block, Partner at Torys LLP – Toronto, ON

"More than 50 percent of new lawyers entering the profession are women. It seems logical that a good number of those women will be our best and our brightest lawyers, and it's important to retain and promote female talent, and to have them rise to leadership roles, for that reason. From an organizational point of view, people bring to the table different ideas based on their backgrounds and experiences. Diversity, male/female and otherwise, is important from that perspective and it's healthy and prudent for the organization to have more than one perspective when making decisions for the firm and our clients. Our clients demand diversity – not just gender

diversity but diversity generally. We are a profession of course, but we are also running a business, and retaining and promoting women in the profession makes good business sense.”

Nora Osbaldeston, Ontario Regional Managing Partner at Miller Thomson LLP – Toronto, ON

Leadership defined

Leadership means more than just a title. It means influencing and motivating others to achieve positive outcomes. It involves being aware of one’s own biases, working on these biases and actively seeking out different perspectives to inform decision-making.¹ Effective leaders have a vision and can influence a diverse group of people to work towards that vision. Leadership can be defined as “a process of influencing people to produce positive outcomes for the firm.”² A leader is “someone who has a vision: someone able to mobilize and inspire others so that everyone is working steadfastly to achieve the same goal.”³

Being a leader does not necessarily mean holding a certain position within a firm or organization. Rather, leadership can be an attitude of mind.⁴ It is important for women to begin to develop leadership skills early in their careers. Even if a junior lawyer does not have anyone to lead yet, she can still act like a leader.

The flat, decentralized structure of many law firms gives rise to numerous leadership opportunities. Leadership is not synonymous with management, although effective leadership does require management skills. The following are some examples of leadership positions common to many law firms.

- ❖ Committee chairs
- ❖ Department heads
- ❖ Practice group leaders
- ❖ Client team leaders
- ❖ Executive committee members
- ❖ Compensation committee members
- ❖ Office and regional managing partners

While there are many opportunities to exercise leadership within most law firms, real power does not necessarily come from holding an office. The ability to influence and lead others can derive from several sources. Revenue generation is often the greatest source of individual power in a law firm. Indeed, lawyers who have strong relationships with their clients can leverage that loyalty into enormous negotiating power.⁵ Other law firm leaders can exercise power even though they are not rainmakers. Their power derives from their personal attributes, such as professionalism, expertise, or dedication.⁶

¹ Center for Creative Leadership, “*Inclusive Leadership: Steps Your Organization Should Take to Get it Right*” (January 11, 2022) online: <https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/when-inclusive-leadership-goes-wrong-and-how-to-get-it-right/>.

² Ida Abbott, *Women on Top - The Woman’s Guide to Leadership and Power in Law Firms* (Thomson Reuters, 2010) at 56 (“Women on Top”).

³ Jennifer Overhaus, *Juggling the Big 3 for Lawyers: A Career-Building Plan to Develop Your Personal Brand, Client Business, and Leadership Mindset* (London, England: ProvechZiel Ltd, 2009) (“Juggling the Big 3”).

⁴ *Ibid* at 419.

⁵ *Women on Top*, *supra* note 2 at 67-8.

⁶ *Ibid* at 72.

In addition to leadership positions in private firms, there are also opportunities for leadership in external professional organizations. External leadership can lead to enhanced stature both within law firms and in the profession at large. Below are examples of external leadership positions within the profession:

- ❖ Professional associations' boards or committees
- ❖ Bencher of the Law Society of Ontario
- ❖ Corporate and charity boards

Finally, leadership can also be achieved through thought leadership: speaking, teaching, and publishing.

Characteristics of successful leaders

The first characteristic of a successful leader is professional excellence. Abbott writes that being an outstanding lawyer “is the sine qua non of law firm leadership. It is what gives you credibility in the eyes of your partners.”⁷ A lawyer may be promoted to leadership based primarily on professional excellence; however successful leadership requires more than producing excellent work for clients. Successful leaders must also produce positive results for the firm.⁸

Effective law firm leaders share many of the following characteristics:⁹

- ❖ Trustworthiness
- ❖ Self-awareness
- ❖ Interpersonal skills
- ❖ Positivity
- ❖ Ambition
- ❖ Strategy
- ❖ Confidence
- ❖ Resilience

Leadership is also situational. Leaders should be flexible to respond to different situations.¹⁰ There is no single preferred model of a law firm leader.

CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

In many ways, the structure, politics, and dominant culture of many law firms presents special difficulties for leaders. Both men and women face challenges in exercising leadership in a law firm; however, they do not necessarily face the same kinds of challenges. While recent progress has been made, women still face some barriers to advancing into leadership and exercising power.

The following are barriers to leadership that have been identified by women lawyers. Strategies to overcome these obstacles will be outlined in this guide.

⁷ *Ibid* at 61.

⁸ *Ibid* at 57.

⁹ Juggling the Big 3, *supra* note 3 at 419-423; Women on Top, *supra* note 2 at 117.

¹⁰ Women on Top, *supra* note 2 at 55.

Leadership fatigue and lack of balance

Only 7.9% of women lawyers are partners in private practice.¹¹ The shortage of women in law firms means that the same women are called on repeatedly to fill leadership positions. A small number of senior women are often asked to serve as “the representative woman” on various committees,¹² and they are frequently asked to speak at events and to mentor other women. The result is that these women may experience leadership fatigue.¹³

Both men and women may struggle to balance their personal lives with a busy law practice, but the challenge is often greatest for women with family responsibilities.¹⁴ In addition, the demands of private practice can make it difficult for women to balance work with leadership obligations.¹⁵

Systemic biases and attitudes

While overt sexism is no longer tolerated in most law firms, all women still face systemic and unconscious biases and attitudes that make leadership more of a challenge.¹⁶ The qualities normally associated with leadership in a law firm are ones typically thought of as masculine. This situation creates a “double bind” for women leaders.¹⁷ If a woman acts consistently with feminine stereotypes she may not be seen as a strong leader, but if she acts in typically masculine ways she may be perceived as too critical, too aggressive or too ambitious. There are also negative attitudes and discrimination toward transgender women and individuals identifying along the feminine end of the gender spectrum based on their gender expression. Any woman can face the challenge of being held to a higher standard, having to constantly prove their ability to lead, something that is generally assumed for men.¹⁸

Women with young children often face an additional challenge of negative stereotyping or unconscious bias.¹⁹ Because a woman is often assumed to have family obligations, her

¹¹ The latest information from the LSO being its [2021 Statistical Snapshot of Lawyers in Ontario](#).

¹² Sara Holtz, *Bringin' in the Rain- A Woman Lawyer's Guide to Business Development* (Granite Bay, CA: ClientFocus, 2008) at 98.

¹³ McKinsey & Company, “*Women leaders continue to feel the burn of burnout*” (February 16, 2022) online: <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/coronavirus-leading-through-the-crisis/charting-the-path-to-the-next-normal/women-leaders-continue-to-feel-the-burn-of-burnout>.

¹⁴ Fiona Kay et. al, “*Women's Careers in the Legal Profession - A Longitudinal Survey of Ontario Lawyers 1990-2002 - A Report to The Law Society of Upper Canada*” (September 2004) online: https://lawsocietyontario.azureedge.net/media/lso/media/legacy/pdf/p/professor_fiona_kay_-_turning_points_and_transitions_-_womens_careers_in_the_legal_profession_2004.pdf.

¹⁵ Angel Chiang, “*Roundtable Recap—Mothers in Law: Women and Work-Life Balance*” (August 22, 2017) online: <https://www.americanbar.org/groups/litigation/committees/diversity-inclusion/articles/2017/summer2017-women-and-work-life-balance/>.

¹⁶ Linda K Robertson, “*And the Women Lawyers Still Leave*” (March 29/ 2012) online: <http://www.slaw.ca/2012/03/29/and-the-women-lawyers-still-leave/>; Joan C. Williams, “*Systemic bias in legal profession confirmed by new report*” (September 6, 2018) online: <https://www.americanbar.org/news/abanews/aba-news-archives/2018/09/new-study-finds-gender-and-racial-bias-endemic-in-legal-professi1/> (“Systemic Bias”).

¹⁷ Calayst, *The Double-Bind Dilemma for Women in Leadership - Damned if You Do, Doomed if You Don't* (2007).

¹⁸ Systemic Bias, *supra* note 16.

¹⁹ Women on Top, *supra* note 2 at 18.

priorities and leadership may be questioned more than a man who faces the same challenges. These stereotypes and biases can be confronted and overcome through increased awareness and open dialogue.

Self-identification of leadership candidates

Some women may never even pursue a leadership opportunity because most of the leaders they see around them are men and even women who do aspire to be leaders may be discouraged by the lack of female role models to emulate.

A further problem is that some women undervalue their own leadership abilities or who feel like they are imposters.²⁰ These women might think that they are not qualified to be a leader unless they have large practices, multiple degrees, or decades of experience. Research has found that women are less likely than men to apply for a promotion. An internal industry study found that women only applied for available positions when they meet 100% of the job requirements, but men applied if they met 60% of the requirements.²¹

Shortage of senior women and tokenism

The shortage of senior women in private practice presents a challenge for firms that want to increase the number of women leaders at all levels.²² In most firms, men greatly outnumber women among the most senior partners,²³ and women are more likely than men to leave private practice. However, the number of women at the junior and mid-levels is increasing, and, over time, there will be a larger number of women poised to take on the top leadership positions.²⁴

Some firms with one or even a handful of women leaders may believe that they do not have a shortage of women in leadership. If a woman suspects that she has been asked to fill a certain leadership role primarily because of her gender or identity, she may be inclined to

²⁰ Anita Gohil-Thorp, "Stop, imposter! Imposter syndrome in the legal profession" (July 6, 2021) online: <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/blogs/stop-imposter-imposter-syndrome-in-the-legal-profession> ; Simon Lewsen, "Why Do So Many Lawyers Experience Imposter Syndrome?" (June 9, 2020) online: <https://precedentjd.com/wellness/why-do-so-many-lawyers-experience-imposter-syndrome/>.

²¹ Women on Top, *supra* note 2 at 208.

²² Natasha S. Madon, Ph.D, "The Retention of Women in the Private Practice of Criminal Law: Research Report" (March 2016) online: <https://criminallawyers.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/CLA-Womens-Study-March-2016.pdf> ; Roberta Liebenberg, "Too Many Senior Women Are Leaving the Profession" (November 14, 2018) online: <https://www.lawpracticetoday.org/article/many-senior-women-leaving-profession/> ; Janice Tibbetts, "Why Women Leave" (June 19, 2018) online: <https://nationalmagazine.ca/en-ca/articles/the-practice/workplace/2018/why-women-leave>

²³ LSO 2018 Annual Report: Only 4.3% of women lawyers are partners.

(source: <https://www.lawtimesnews.com/resources/practice-management/ontarios-law-firms-were-mostly-led-by-men-again-in-2018/263551#:~:text=Men%20continue%20to%20be%20more,men%20in%20partnership%20is%20troubling>)

²⁴ Varsha Patel, "The Gender Cliff Edge: The Point Where the Legal Industry Loses Female Talent" (May 31, 2022) online: <https://www.law.com/international-edition/2022/05/31/the-gender-cliff-edge-the-point-where-the-legal-industry-loses-female-talent/> ; Marc Brodherson, Laura McGee, Mariana Pires dos Reis, "Women in law firms" (2017) online: <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/featured%20insights/gender%20equality/women%20in%20law%20firms/women-in-law-firms-final-103017.pdf> ; Jonathan Hurtarte, "How Big Law Aims to Make Good on 'Meritocracy', Lessen Pay Gap" (June 2, 2022) online: <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/business-and-practice/how-big-law-aims-to-make-good-on-meritocracy-lessen-pay-gap>.

turn down the position, especially if taking the position would subject her to greater scrutiny.²⁵ If there is only one woman on an important committee, that woman may feel pressure to prove that she is not unfairly favouring other women in the firm. Another risk is that she may be seen as the representative of all women in the firm.

Compensation and law firm culture

In most firms, compensation is determined primarily based on the amount of business generated and hours billed. Other significant non-billable contributions, such as recruitment, professional development, mentoring, and management, are just as essential to the long-term success of the firm, but they are rarely financially rewarded.²⁶

This can have a disproportionate impact on women because women partners are often under significant informal pressure to make these kinds of contributions to the firm and to the profession.

Culture and politics also affect the selection of leaders, as well as the way law firm leaders make decisions. Some firms are very accepting of diverse leadership styles and women are actively championed, while others will only accept leaders that conform to a more traditional model of leadership that does not prioritize diversity.²⁷ Most firms are somewhere in between those two extremes.²⁸

The decentralized structure of most law firms means that few people can advance to leadership positions without the support of the majority of partners. Generating this support requires trust and time.

Unfortunately, many firms lack formal leadership development programs and assume that leaders are born and not made. While research shows that women are just as likely as men to have mentors, women have historically received little mentoring in navigating law firm politics and strategically choosing leadership roles. Moreover, men's mentors are more likely to be sponsors – an influential person who uses his or her clout to actively advocate for the protégés advancement.²⁹ The result is that women are less likely than men to have a sponsor champion their advancement into leadership.

²⁵ Jean E. Wallace, Fiona M. Kay, "Tokenism, Organizational Segregation, and Coworker Relations in Law Firms" (2012) online:

https://soci.ucalgary.ca/manageprofile/sites/soci.ucalgary.ca.manageprofile/files/unitis/publications/1-4057385/Tokenism_Segregation_and_Worker_Relations.pdf.

²⁶ Akima Paul Lambert, "Pay Women Lawyers for All Their Work" (May 5, 2022) online:

<https://news.bloomberglaw.com/us-law-week/pay-women-lawyers-for-all-their-work>.

²⁷ Ronald E. Wood, "2022 Law Firm Culture Survey" (July 26, 2022) online:

<https://www.natlawreview.com/article/2022-law-firm-culture-survey>.

²⁸ Women on Top, *supra* note 2 at 98.

²⁹ Nancy M Carter & Christine Silva, *Mentoring: Necessary but Insufficient for Advancement* (Catalyst, 2010).

STRATEGIES FOR WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP SUCCESS

Strategy 1 – Sponsorship towards leadership

A sponsor is a champion who personally invests in a person's success by appointing them to or promoting them for leadership roles:³⁰ "Unlike mentoring, which may often be limited to occasional meetings and coaching sessions, sponsorship is a long-term, hands-on commitment to encouraging, fighting for and creating advancement opportunities for high-potential individuals."³¹ A sponsor must be someone who has clout. Because there are relatively few senior women in law firms, most people who are in a position to be sponsors are men. While women are just as likely as men to have mentors, it is sponsors, not mentors, who actually help women advance in their careers.

Sponsorship is critical to women's advancement into leadership positions.³² Abbott writes that in order to become a law firm leader, it is necessary to have sponsors who "get you appointed to important positions and committees, and send you business and clients."³³

Below is a list of things that a sponsor typically does for a protégé:

- ❖ Provides the protégé with challenging assignments to develop their skills and increase their visibility
- ❖ Introduces the protégé to influential people
- ❖ Publicizes the protégé's accomplishments
- ❖ Ensures that the protégé is recognized for their contributions
- ❖ Stands by the protégé when they make mistakes
- ❖ Tells the protégé when they are ready for a promotion
- ❖ Advocates for the protégé to be promoted to a leadership position
- ❖ Continues to support the protégé even after the protégé achieves their leadership goals

Finding A Sponsor

In order to attract a sponsor, protégés should demonstrate their potential to powerful people. In order to agree to advocate on a behalf of a protégé, a sponsor should not only want to help, but they should also believe in the protégés ability to succeed.³⁴

Women can proactively seek out a sponsor by identifying those people who are in a position to champion them and developing relationships with those people. The protégé should look for opportunities to work with potential sponsors and demonstrate her talents to them. Once a potential sponsor gets to know the protégé and the quality of her work, the protégé can

³⁰ Women on Top, *supra* note 2 at 171.

³¹ Ernst & Young, *The Corporate Sponsor as Hero, Advancing Women into Leadership Roles* (EGYM Ltd, 2011) online: http://www.flourishleaders.com/wp-content/themes/flourish_3_0_0/assets/pdfs/white-paper/E&YWomensSponsor.whhttp.pdf.

³² Kristin L. Walker-Probst, "You've Got a Friend in High Places: The Power of Sponsorship for Women" (November 19, 2019) online: <https://www.natlawreview.com/article/you-ve-got-friend-high-places-power-sponsorship-women>.

³³ Ida Abbott, "How Political Dynamics Undermine Gender Balance in Law Firm Leadership and What Your Firm Must Do About It" online: <https://idaabbott.com>.

³⁴ Herminia Ibarra/ Nancy M Carter & Christine Silva "Why Men Still Get More Promotions Than Women" *Harvard Business Review* (2010).

initiate the sponsorship relationship by asking for help with something specific, such as asking the sponsor to make an introduction her, or to include her on a client pitch team. A sponsor will be more likely to help if they are requested to do something very specific. Once a sponsor begins to champion a protégé, it is more likely that they will continue to do so, since the sponsor has become invested in the protégé's success.

If a protégé already has a strong relationship with a sponsor, the sponsor can talk to the protégé about her leadership goals and advocate for her to be promoted to a leadership position.

Strategy 2 – Prepare for Leadership

In the early stages of their legal careers, women should develop strong legal skills, client relationships and credibility within their firms. Women should position themselves for leadership by creating a leadership plan, seizing opportunities, seeking out role models, and developing a reputation as leadership material.

Creating a leadership plan

A leadership plan outlines a career vision, sets goals, and documents the actions necessary to achieve those goals. A leadership plan does not take long to draft and is extremely valuable.

There are several benefits to creating a leadership plan. Articulating goals and a vision increases the likelihood that leadership opportunities will be noticed when they arise. The plan also provides a mechanism for strategically evaluating career opportunities in terms of whether they will advance specific career goals. Additionally, writing down goals increases accountability, and makes it more likely that the goals will be achieved.

There are many different paths to leadership in a law firm, and the strategy that a woman chooses should be one that suits her skills and values. Some people pursue leadership by advancing through management positions. Others attain leadership through rainmaking ability. It is not necessary for every leader to be a rainmaker; however, in many firms the ability to bring in business is considered a prerequisite to being considered for a management position.

A career plan should incorporate opportunities for “horizontal” development (expanding into different clients and practice groups) as well as “vertical” development (taking on more responsibility and more advanced legal work).³⁵

Considerations in developing a leadership plan:

- ❖ Self-assessment – identify one's individual values and reasons for wanting to be a leader.
- ❖ Personal needs – consider how one's personal needs relate to one's professional vision.
- ❖ Goal setting – set short-, medium-, and long-term goals.
- ❖ Compatibility – determine whether one's individual goals are compatible with the firm's

³⁵ Judith Finer Freedman, *Cracking the Code: Unlocking the Potential of Future Leaders in the Legal Profession* (Thomson Reuters, 2010) at 119.

- goals.
- ❖ Role models – identify the people who currently occupy leadership positions.
- ❖ Sponsors – identify the people with clout who can help.
- ❖ Action steps – outline the actions necessary to achieve one's goals.

See the sample Leadership Plan in the Appendix.

Identifying leadership role models

Role models are critical for learning how to be a leader. Aspiring leaders develop their own leadership style by observing how others lead and trying out different techniques. Over time, a leader creates her own unique leadership style by incorporating elements of various leadership styles.

The following are some suggestions for women looking for potential role models:

- ❖ Look to role models in a variety of practice areas.
- ❖ Look to role models at different firms.
- ❖ Join external organizations, such as professional associations and industry groups.
- ❖ Recognize that no one is perfect. Many people choose to emulate their role models in certain ways, but not in others.
- ❖ Do not rule out male role models. Instead, look for someone with a leadership style that resonates with you.
- ❖ Stay connected to your peers so you can become effective role models for each other.

Be perceived as leadership material

For a legal professional who identifies as a woman to become a leader, others in her firm must think of her as leadership material. If she is seen as a potential leader, they will think of her when leadership opportunities arise. As she gains more experience, her reputation as a leader will be enhanced, and leadership development opportunities will continue to come her way.

The following are some typical characteristics of women with strong leadership potential:

- ❖ They complete assignments on time.
- ❖ They have a reputation for being honest, reliable and effective.
- ❖ They are respected for their technical legal skills.
- ❖ They tell others about their accomplishments in tactful ways. Catalyst research found that women who are proactive in making their achievements known advance farther in their careers.³⁶
- ❖ They seek feedback and credit from their supervisors as appropriate.
- ❖ They act like leaders in every interaction by taking initiative, demonstrating good judgement, and supporting others.
- ❖ They actively seek opportunities to lead. They look at methods to make changes that are in the firm's best interests.

³⁶ Nancy M Carter & Christine Silva, *The Myth of the Ideal Worker: Does Doing All the Right Things Really Get Women Ahead?* (Catalyst, 2011).

Join A Committee

Committee work presents numerous leadership development opportunities for associates and paralegals. Committees provide a venue for associates and paralegals to meet and network with senior partners, cross-market themselves to lawyers in other practice areas, learn about the inner workings of the firm, and demonstrate their leadership potential in a relatively safe environment. Experience sitting on minor committees as an associate could lead to a position on a major committee later on.

For small or mid-sized firms that do not have committees, associates and paralegals can find other ways to become involved in management tasks, including recruitment and hiring, or in professional development initiatives.

Strategy 3 – Develop leadership competencies at the mid and senior level

At the mid and senior level, women can continue to develop their leadership skills by sitting on committees, getting leadership experience, developing a leadership style, and pursuing opportunities for formal leadership training.

Obtaining Leadership Experience

Experience is the key learning strategy for leadership. “The best way to learn it and be good at it is to do it.”³⁷ Below are some suggestions for ways women can get more leadership experience with both clients and firm administration:

- ❖ A common way to start is by taking on a modest leadership role in the firm, for instance by heading up a project, or sitting on a committee or task force.
- ❖ Leading a file or a client team is another good way to get leadership experience. If the team or project is profitable, the leader’s skills will be noted. If she treats her team members well, they will become her loyal supporters as she moves up in the firm leadership.³⁸

External leadership positions, such as professional associations or industry groups, can be a steppingstone to leadership within a law firm.

- ❖ An excellent way to learn leadership skills is by seizing opportunities when they present themselves. For example, there is an opening as chair of the summer associate program. Taking that opportunity, even though this may not be a position of great influence in the firm could be a steppingstone to another position.
- ❖ Attend Continuing Professional Development programs to expand legal expertise in substantive subjects and in project management.

³⁷ Women on Top, *supra* note 2 at 184.

³⁸ *Ibid* at 185.

Choose committees and firm activities strategically

Committee participation is a common way to enter law firm leadership. Committee participation provides an opportunity to understand how the firm is run. Committee work also enables women to gain visibility among partners and earn a reputation as effective leaders. In some firms, leadership on a committee is considered a steppingstone to more significant leadership positions.³⁹

When deciding whether a position with a particular committee will help advance specific leadership goals, women may want to consider the following questions:⁴⁰

- ❖ What committees does the firm have? What are the options? If the firm does not have committees, are there other leadership positions in the firm (i.e., practice group leader, department head, client manager)?
- ❖ How influential is the committee? In most firms, the Executive Committee and the Compensation Committee are the most focused on the business of the firm.
- ❖ Which committees do influential people care about? Joining those committees is a good way to get noticed.
- ❖ What is the time commitment for participation in each committee? Weigh the time commitment against the level of influence the committee has and the potential level of career satisfaction from participating in the committee.
- ❖ How does committee work affect the compensation and client relationships of members? If spending time on committee work causes a reduction in the earnings of members, can they negotiate for an increase?
- ❖ Are there committees that require chairs or vice-chairs? What is the process to be appointed chair or vice-chair?

Developing a leadership style

As women advance through various leadership positions, they have many opportunities to try out different leadership styles. A woman may find that certain leadership styles are well suited to her strengths and personality. A survey of female leaders by consulting firm Zenger Folkman found that women rate higher than men not only on “nurturing” competencies but also stereotypically male traits, such as taking initiative and driving for results.⁴¹ A study of women leaders in the US and the UK by Caliper Corporation found that women are likely to bring distinct personality and motivational strengths to leadership: they tend to be more assertive, persuasive, empathetic, willing to take risks, outgoing and flexible, and they have a strong need to get things done.⁴² The best leaders are true to themselves, but also flexible. Effective leaders adapt to the particular demands of any given situation and use the style that is best suited to meet the specific challenges facing the organization.

Below are five practices that can help you develop an exemplary leadership style (adapted to

³⁹ *Ibid* at 158.

⁴⁰ *Ibid* at 161.

⁴¹ Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman “*Are Women Better Leaders than Men?*” *Harvard Business Review* (15 March 2012).

⁴² Caliper Corporation “*The Qualities that Distinguish Women Leaders*” online: <https://www.calipercanada.com/portfolio/the-qualities-that-distinguish-women-leaders/>.

the law firm setting):⁴³

1. **Model the way** – clarify your values by finding your voice and affirming shared values at your firm. Set the example by aligning your actions with shared values.
2. **Inspire a shared vision** – enlist others in a common vision at your firm by appealing to shared aspirations.
3. **Challenge the process** – search for opportunities to improve and look outside of your firm for innovative ideas (if necessary).
4. **Enable others to act** – foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships. Strengthen others by increasing your self-determination and competence.
5. **Encourage the heart** – recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence. Celebrate the values and victories of your colleagues by creating a spirit of community.

Resource Tips

The following are books on leadership that may interest you:

- ❖ *In Primal Leadership* by Daniel Goleman
- ❖ *How Remarkable Women Lead* by Joanna Barsh and Susie Cranston
- ❖ *women and leadership* by Julia Gilliard & Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala
- ❖ *HBR's 10 Must-Reads on Women and Leadership* by Harvard Business Review
- ❖ *Lean In* by Sheryl Sandberg
- ❖ *Rising Strong: How the Ability to Reset Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent and Lead* by Brené Brown
- ❖ *More Than Enough* by Elaine Welteroth
- ❖ *Grit* by Angela Duckworth
- ❖ *In the Company of Women: Inspiration and Advice from over 100 Makers, Artists and Entrepreneurs* by Grace Bonney
- ❖ *Becoming* by Michelle Obama
- ❖ *The Little Black Book of Success* by Elaine Meryl Brown, Marsha Haygood et al.
- ❖ *The Confidence Code* by Katty Kay and Claire Shipman

Check out the following websites and organizations with women leaders:

- ❖ [Lean In](#)
- ❖ [Catalyst](#)
- ❖ [Stanford University](#)
- ❖ [Canadian Women's Foundation](#)
- ❖ [Indigenous Leadership Initiative](#)
- ❖ [Black Female Lawyers' Network](#)
- ❖ [Women Lawyers Forum](#)
- ❖ [Women Lawyers](#)
- ❖ [Women's Law Association of Ontario](#)
- ❖ [Young Women in Law](#)

⁴³ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2017).

- ❖ [Indigenous Bar Association](#)
- ❖ [Asian Women in Law](#)
- ❖ [Women of Color Research Initiative](#)
- ❖ [Women Lawyers' Mentorship Toolkit](#)
- ❖ [Interrupting Racial & Gender Bias in the Legal Profession](#)
- ❖ [Identifying and Combating Sex-Based Harassment in the Legal Profession](#)
- ❖ [Women in Law \(Quick Take\)](#)

Leadership development training

Law firms have been behind the business world in leadership development and training. Traditionally law firms have not followed the practice of the business world by identifying and training promising candidates for leadership. That is changing, however. Formal leadership development training is an emerging best practice among law firms. Increasingly, law firms are realizing that leadership skills are skills that can be taught.

Resource Tips

- ❖ Attend courses that focus on leadership and law firm management. Several universities and organizations in Canada and the United States offer courses and training sessions on these topics. Inquire if your firm can cover the cost.
- ❖ Hire a leadership coach to help improve your leadership skills. Coaches help their clients identify their strengths and areas of weakness, set career goals, and help them stay focused and motivated. Some law firms hire leadership coaches to work with new partners or leadership candidates one-on-one. Ask if your firm does the same.

APPENDIX: USEFUL CHECKLISTS FROM THIS GUIDE

Sample Leadership Plan

Leadership vision:

Goals:

Short term goals (1 year)

- Find a sponsor
- Sit on a committee of an external organization
- Develop ability to deliver services in multiple languages

Medium term goals (2-5 years)

- Act as a mentor to a summer student
- Develop law firm management skills
- Act as lead counsel on client matter

Long term goals (5-10 years)

- Become a partner
- Become head of a firm practice group
- Act as a sponsor for junior woman lawyers

Action Steps:

- Join and become active in the Ontario Bar Association, Toronto Lawyers Association, Canadian Association of Black Lawyers, South Asian Bar Association etc.
- Look for strategic work opportunities
- Take increased responsibility for client management Volunteer to arrange a client event
- Meet regularly with sponsor/mentor
- Attend leadership and/or law firm management training
- Take a French course

Resources:

- Individuals who will help:
- Internal firm resources:
- Other resources:

Leadership positions common to many law firms:

- ❖ Committee chairs
- ❖ Department heads
- ❖ Practice group leaders
- ❖ Client team leaders
- ❖ Executive committee members
- ❖ Compensation committee members
- ❖ Office and regional managing partners

Examples of external leadership positions within the profession:

- ❖ Professional associations' boards or committees
- ❖ OBA practice groups, Toronto Lawyers Association, Canadian Association of Black Lawyers, South Asian Bar Association etc.
- ❖ Bencher of the Law Society of Ontario
- ❖ Participation in Law Society Committees and working groups
- ❖ Corporate and charity boards

Characteristics of effective law firm leaders:⁴⁴

- ❖ Trustworthiness
- ❖ Self-awareness
- ❖ Interpersonal skills
- ❖ Positivity
- ❖ Ambition
- ❖ Strategy
- ❖ Confidence
- ❖ Resilience

List of things that a sponsor typically does for a protégé:

- ❖ Provides the protégé with challenging assignments to develop her skills and increase her visibility
- ❖ Introduces the protégé to influential people
- ❖ Publicizes the protégé's accomplishments
- ❖ Ensures that the protégé is recognized for her contributions
- ❖ Stands by the protégé when she makes mistakes
- ❖ Tells the protégé when she is ready for a promotion
- ❖ Advocates for the protégé to be promoted to a leadership position
- ❖ Continues to support the protégé even after the protégé achieves her leadership goal

Considerations in developing a leadership plan:

- ❖ Self-assessment – identify one's individual values and reasons for wanting to be a leader.
- ❖ Personal needs – consider how one's personal needs relate to one's professional vision.
- ❖ Goal setting – set short-, medium-, and long-term goals.
- ❖ Compatibility – determine whether one's individual goals are compatible with the firm's goals
- ❖ Role models – identify the people who currently occupy leadership positions.
- ❖ Sponsors – identify the people with clout who can help.
- ❖ Action steps – outline the actions necessary to achieve one's goals.

Suggestions for women looking for potential role models:

- ❖ Look to role models in a variety of practice areas.

⁴⁴ Juggling the Big 3, *supra* note 3 at 419-423; Women on Top, *supra* note 2 at 117.

- ❖ Look to role models at different firms.
- ❖ Join external organizations, such as professional associations and industry groups.
- ❖ Recognize that no one is perfect. Many people choose to emulate their role models in certain ways, but not in others.
- ❖ Do not rule out male role models. Find someone with a leadership style that resonates with you.
- ❖ Stay connected to your peers so you can become effective role models for each other.

Typical characteristics of women with strong leadership potential:

- ❖ They always complete assignments on time.
- ❖ They have a reputation for being honest, reliable and effective.
- ❖ They are respected for their technical legal skills.
- ❖ They tell others about their accomplishments in tactful ways. Catalyst research found that women who are proactive in making their achievements known advance farther in their careers.⁴⁵
- ❖ They seek feedback and credit from their supervisors as appropriate.
- ❖ They act like leaders in every interaction by taking initiative, demonstrating good judgement, and supporting others.
- ❖ They actively seek opportunities to lead. They look at methods to make changes that are in the firm's best interests

Suggestions for ways women can get more leadership experience with both clients and firm administration:

- ❖ A common way to start is by taking on a modest leadership role in the firm, for instance by heading up a project, or sitting on a committee or task force.
- ❖ Leading a file or a client team is another good way to get leadership experience. If the team or project is profitable, the leader's skills will be noted. If she treats her team members well, they will become her loyal supporters as she moves up in the firm leadership.⁴⁶
- ❖ External leadership positions, such as professional associations or industry groups, can be a steppingstone to leadership within a law firm.
- ❖ An excellent way to learn leadership skills is by seizing opportunities when they present themselves. For example, there is an opening as chair of the summer associate program. Taking that opportunity, even though this may not be a position of great influence in the firm could be a steppingstone to another position.
- ❖ Attend Continuing Professional Development programs in order to expand legal expertise in substantive subjects and in project management

Questions to consider when deciding whether a position with a particular committee will help advance specific leadership goals:⁴⁷

- ❖ What committees does the firm have? What are the options? If the firm does not have committees, are there other leadership positions in the firm (i.e., practice group leader, department head, client manager)?
- ❖ How powerful is the committee? In most firms, the Executive Committee and the

⁴⁵ Nancy M Carter & Christine Silva, *The Myth of the Ideal Worker: Does Doing All the Right Things Really Get Women Ahead?* (Catalyst, 2011).

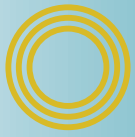
⁴⁶ Women on Top, *supra* note 2 at 185.

⁴⁷ *Ibid* at 161.

- Compensation Committee are the most powerful.
- ❖ Which committees do influential people care about? Joining those committees is a good way to get noticed.
 - ❖ What is the time commitment for participation in each committee? Weigh the time commitment against the level of influence the committee has and the potential level of career satisfaction from participating in the committee.
 - ❖ How does committee work affect the compensation and client relationships of members? If spending time on committee work causes a reduction in the earnings of members, can they negotiate for an increase?
 - ❖ Are there committees that require chairs or vice-chairs? What is the process to be appointed chair or vice-chair?

Qualities to look for in potential role models:

- ❖ Ability to navigate the particular challenges that women face
- ❖ Shows optimism and enthusiasm for the profession and for the firm
- ❖ Ability to gracefully self-promote without alienating others
- ❖ Exercises humility without being self-deprecating
- ❖ Invests in the development of others
- ❖ Effectively delegates work
- ❖ Balances work with other obligations
- ❖ Relates well to colleagues at all levels, from senior partners to administrators
- ❖ Good communication and listening skills
- ❖ Effective networker
- ❖ Good judgment
- ❖ Highly competent



Law Society
of Ontario

Barreau
de l'Ontario

©2023 Law Society of Ontario
Osgoode Hall
130 Queen Street West
Toronto, Ontario M5H 2N6

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