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## The Strategic Planning Process: Just Get'er Done

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### Why Firms Should Develop a Strategic Plan

When I work with law firms which profess to have strategic plans, I find it bewildering that they often are stored in the management teams' drawers somewhere and rarely are implemented. I scratch my head and ask why bother expending the energy and time to develop a course for the firm if there is no system created to implement the plan. What a colossal waste of everyone's time and resources.

The contrast of a profitable and barely surviving law firm can often be traced to how seriously its leadership commits themselves to the strategic planning process and how effectively they have defined the firm's collective mission and business goals, its culture, value system and beliefs, and desire to grow in its marketplace.

The strategic planning process, if well-defined and carefully implemented, will cultivate a greater sense of team work, ownership larger than an individual lawyer, and common goals and direction at all levels of a firm as well as to strengthen communication and help achieve "emotional equity" among its partners. This is critical for the implementation to be successful.

### Implementation

The real rewards of the strategic planning process are in the plan implementation. Anyone who has worked through this process knows that this is the most difficult part but one which presents a tremendous opportunity to advance a firm's goals.

Follow these steps for successful plan implementation:

- Leverage the existing organizational structure (management committee, practice group leaders, key partner influencers, etc.) to develop strong "buy-in" and common vision for what precisely the strategic plan is designed to accomplish.
- Goals and timeframes must be clearly defined and easily measured. Everyone should understand what success and plan achievement will look like. Additionally, the partnership needs to believe the strategic

plan goals and implementation are realistic and worth accomplishing.

- All involved parties must be assigned responsibility and held accountable for appropriate implementation according to an agreed-upon timetable. This is where the legal marketing advisor can bring value by tracking plan implementation and reporting to the management team regularly.
- Circulate status reports to keep partners apprised of plan activities. Encourage partners to voice input but not at the expense of derailing the prescribed course of action.
- Recognizing that strategic planning is a dynamic and fluid process, a deliberative evaluation process should be in place to assess plan effectiveness and corrective action steps to be taken to right the course, as needed.
- Working with the management team throughout the process to sell the strategic plan, create buy-in by explaining the benefits to be derived as the result of implementation, key non-attorney legal professionals can leverage their positions to keep momentum and the implementation process at a high level.

The strategic planning process, when thoughtfully developed and carefully implemented, can be an especially helpful tool for firms to provide highly valuable information for setting short and long-term goals and objectives, and identifying opportunities which may not have otherwise been considered nor conceived. Failure should not be an option.