

PETER SCOTT CONSULTING

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How to enhance your Top Team's Performance

"If you don't drive your business, you will be driven out of business"

BC Forbes, journalist and publisher, *Finance, Business, and the Business of Life* (1915)

Law firm leaders cannot do it all alone – they need to be supported by strong teams around them – a **'Top Team'**. In particular law firm leaders need to:

- **encourage their Top Team to lead**, and to instil in them an understanding that it is **they** who must drive change if the firm is to stay ahead; and
- ask themselves whether their Top Team is **'fit for purpose'**. In particular do members of the team:
 - Lift their heads from their desks and **think strategically** about their respective parts of the business, as well as just operationally or in relation to their client work?
 - Prioritise their thinking around **'innovating'** when planning how they work and use the technology available to them, to steal a march over rivals?
 - Take everyone out of their comfort zones to **drive out complacency** and encourage ambition?
 - Understand and put into practice how to be **'accountable'**?
 - Focus on the **actions** they will now need to take if they are to lead and grow their teams to maintain a competitive edge?

To achieve any of these objectives, as a law firm leader you will need to:

1. Identify what you are seeking to achieve with your Top Team; and
2. Understand which aspects of your Top Team's performance will need to be enhanced for you to achieve those objectives

1. Identifying what you are seeking to achieve with your Top Team

This process cannot be carried out in isolation to everything else your firm is seeking to achieve, because enhancing performance in today's more demanding legal markets needs to be closely aligned with the **strategic** needs of your Firm.

Accordingly, take a critical look at:

- the future needs of your business and your **strategic objectives**
 - **What kind of law firm do we realistically want to be?** and
 - **How achievable will it be for us to get there?**
- What **roles** will need to be performed in the next stage of your firm's development in relation to, for example:
 - People
 - Finance
 - Growth and strategic development
 - Business development
 - Risk and compliance
 - IT
 - Other necessary functions?
- Do we have the **people resources** available to fulfil such roles, whether from:
 - Internal sources?
 - External sources? or
 - Will they will need to be recruited?
- The **abilities** of your Top Team, and whether each member of your Top Team:
 - Is the best person for the job?
 - Challenges every aspect of your firm's operations and every assumption on which your current plans are based?
 - Is building consensus that change may be necessary?
- Whether you have **quick response times** to threats and opportunities, and the effectiveness of **your decision-making** and implementation processes
- Your **governance** arrangements, because your Top Team will need to be an intrinsic part of your governance structures to ensure effective decision-making and implementation.
- Whether you focus strongly on **change management** to achieve competitive advantage? and
- Above all, whether your Top Team is made up of **capable people** who are open-minded, flexible, and prepared to learn new skills and ways of operating:
 - This will require it to be a priority that your Top Team is **highly trained, skilled, and motivated;** and
 - Your firm's **performance management** processes should be designed to help to raise the bar for everyone, not just for your Top Team.

2. Which aspects of your Top Team's performance will need to be enhanced if you are achieve your objectives?

For example:

What will your Top Team need to do:

- Differently?
- More of?
- Less of?
- Better?

Some aspects of a Top Team's performance which may need to be enhanced to achieve this:

A Top Team will need to:

- Commit to a clear **common purpose**
- Prioritise their time towards what is **important** and not just urgent, (working **on the firm** rather than just working in the firm)
- 'Lift their heads from their desks' and **think strategically** about their roles, as well as just day to day operations;
- Understand and acknowledge that it is **they** who must drive change if your firm is to stay ahead of the game, and so they must be encouraged **to lead**;
- Learn how to **build consensus** internally regarding the need to change, in order to take their people with them
- Understand and put into practice how to be **'accountable'**;

In the next Briefing Note I will be discussing how to raise your Top Team's performance, based around:

- What you have identified you are seeking to achieve with your Top Team; and
- Those aspects of performance identified as being necessary to be enhanced if members of your Top Team are to achieve your firm's objectives;

I will focus in particular on the possible **techniques** which can be used to obtain the agreement by your Top Team to the steps each should take to ensure your team as a whole is **fit for purpose**.

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