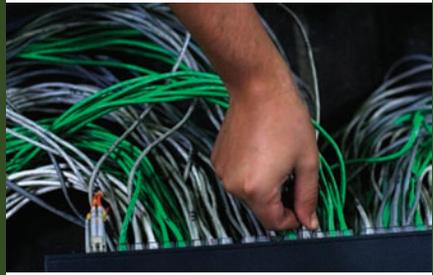


Law Firm
Management
and Economics:

Women on Top— The Woman's Guide to Leadership and Power in Law Firms

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Chapter 11

Ambition

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§ 11:1 Acknowledge your ambitions

The greater danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim too high and falling short, but in setting our aim too low and achieving our mark.

—Michelangelo

You need to be ambitious to be a law firm leader. If this disturbs you because ambition sounds like a character flaw, you may misunderstand what ambition is. Ambition is nothing more than a strong desire to succeed and be recognized as successful. If you are interested in becoming a leader, you must come to terms with your personal ambitions. The way you begin this process is by becoming more self-aware. Awareness involves recognizing and understanding what your values, strengths, and limitations are so that you can find a way to achieve your ambitions and feel good about yourself and what you are doing at the same time. Having a clear vision of who you are, what you want, and where you want to go is the beginning of your journey to leadership.

Psychiatrist Anna Fels explains that ambition simply combines a desire for mastery (i.e., being skilled) with a desire for approval from others—in this case, your law firm. Acquiring mastery gives you control over your destiny; recognition affirms your accomplishments and shows that others value and appreciate you.

Without mastery, you cannot be effective or enjoy the respect of your peers; without approval, you feel isolated and, ultimately, demoralized. When in balance—when your need for recognition does not outweigh your need for mastery—you can be incredibly productive and realizing your ambitions can be extremely fulfilling.¹

Ambitious lawyers work hard and are driven to achieve. They have a clear sense of purpose and are persistent, well-prepared, and optimistic. With single-minded devotion, they embrace challenges and overcome obstacles. They are determined to excel and be considered the best in their field. For many lawyers, these personal ambitions are sufficient. However, other lawyers seek more. They couple their personal ambitions with a desire to make a difference in something they care about. It is their focus on something larger than themselves that motivates many to step forward and become leaders. For women leaders in particular, contributing to something larger than oneself is an important source of motivation, meaning, and satisfaction. It sustains women as they strive toward leadership and keeps them engaged and passionate about their work once they achieve it.²

In a law firm, leaders who feel this way care deeply about the firm and the people in it. They view themselves as stewards of the firm's resources, including its people, its physical assets such as finances and property, and its intangible assets such as good will and reputation. They understand that each individual is part of the larger organization and that their actions have consequences for others and for the firm as a whole. These leaders have a strong commitment to the firm's future and make every effort to ensure that the firm is a better place and in better shape when they leave than when they start. The higher a leader's role in the firm, the farther her perspective extends beyond today to encompass future generations of lawyers and clients.

Women lawyers begin their careers with ambitions similar to men's.³ Their psychological needs for power and autonomy are no

[Section 11:1]

¹Fels, A. (2005), *Necessary dreams: ambition in women's changing lives* (Harpwell, ME: Anchor).

²Barsh, J., & Cranston, S. (Oct. 2008), Centered leadership: how talented women thrive, *McKinsey Quarterly*.

³Hildebrandt International (2007), *Understanding associates: new perspectives on associate satisfaction and morale*.

different than men's.⁴ They are high achievers and top performers, and they expect that their performance and value will be recognized and appreciated by the firm. They have a strong desire to control their own destiny, which requires acting assertively on their own behalf. However, when they promote themselves, challenge practices that do not support their goals, or openly pursue firm leadership, they are criticized as "overly ambitious." Law firm partners are suspicious of anyone they view as ambitious, both women and men, because it suggests egotism, self-aggrandizement, or manipulative use of others for selfish ends. However, women carry a heavier burden. Ambition in men is seen as necessary and desirable for career success and treated as "a hallmark and virtue of manhood."⁵ In women, ambition is considered unfeminine and unnatural. While men are expected to be ambitious and merely have to manage their ambitions, women have to mask theirs.⁶ So women downplay their ambition because the implications make them uncomfortable and open them up to criticism.

The suppression of women's aspirations is one of the reasons for the dearth of women leaders in law firms. As their careers progress many women become discouraged. Unable to give full expression to their ambitions, or disparaged when they do, women feel unfairly constrained and isolated. They may attain a very high degree of mastery as lawyers but still find that the career possibilities for them are limited. They see few women at the top in their firms, they do not feel valued by the firm, and they do not see a meaningful career end point considering the work they are putting into their practice. They lose confidence in their ability to attain their goals or believe that to do so would require them to betray or unduly compromise their core values. Women who feel discouraged and start to lose their ambition often leave the firm for more conducive work environments. Those women who overcome or escape these feelings and maintain the drive to forge ahead can become productive and successful leaders.

When women downplay their ambition, rather than envision great things for themselves, they accept roles and rewards that are merely "good enough." As an aspiring leader, you should want to be, and be recognized as, great, the best, the top. I was in a hospital recently where a sign directed at patients and visitors

⁴Austin, L.S. (2000), *What's holding you back? Eight critical choices for women's success* (New York: Basic Books).

⁵Wilson, M.C. (2007), *Closing the leadership gap: why women can and must help run the world* (New York: Penguin Books).

⁶Wilson (2007), *Closing the leadership gap*, p. 53.

said, “It is our mission to give you very good service.” Somehow that message was uninspiring. Leaders do not settle for “very good”; they strive to make their firms “excellent,” “superior,” “outstanding.” Likewise, that’s what you should expect in your career.

A large majority of the leaders I interviewed knew early in their careers that they wanted to be leaders. One of them said, “*I knew that being a leader would give me more control—as well as accountability—for my own success. If I’m going to bet on anyone, it’s better to bet on myself.*” Another said, “*I wanted to be managing partner of this firm because I want to make a difference for the people here, help them become the best they can be in their jobs, help them realize their dreams and their goals.*” Whether or not they set their sights on particular leadership positions or goals, these women knew they would be excellent leaders, valued being leaders, and expected to become leaders in their firms. Even those who were surprised when they were offered leadership positions had proven their leadership abilities through their contributions to the firm and welcomed the new responsibilities—as well as the firm’s recognition.

Virtually all of the women I interviewed felt that as leaders, they could and did make a difference in many different ways, e.g., setting strategic direction for their firm, making the firm a better workplace for everyone, and advancing the interests of women and/or minority lawyers. Most of the interviewed leaders also took personal satisfaction in leadership. They loved what they did, felt they were good at it, and took pride in their accomplishments. As one woman said, “*I’ve achieved it! My kids admire me for it.*”

If you become a partner in a law firm, you have demonstrated your intellectual abilities and been acknowledged for your professional accomplishments. This distinguishes you from most other lawyers, both women and men. More importantly, you have already shown that you are ambitious because it took a powerful desire, perseverance, and hard work to pursue and achieve partnership. Moving into leadership is a logical next step, although not for everyone. Leadership means continued hard work, new challenges, and perhaps steeper obstacles than you faced before. However, if you aspire to greatness, not just goodness, then muster the courage to move ahead, fulfill your ambitions, and fully express your talents. You have come so far; don’t stop now!

- *Early on, I saw there's an A Team and a B Team, and I was determined to be on the A Team.*
- *I saw other lawyers happy to be sitting in the second chair, in a service role, and I thought: Maybe that's good enough for them, but I want to be the #1 person, the lead trial lawyer.*
- *As a litigator, I knew I was good—better than the more experienced guys I saw in court. I always wanted to be first chair, always thought I could do well. I wanted to stand out.*
- *I saw women partners dependent on male partners and I said, Not me! If I'm going to be a great lawyer, I want to depend on me, not him. I won't be intimidated. Otherwise, why bother?*
- *There's nothing like being the [practice group leader] who decides what marketing initiatives to pursue, sets group objectives for the year, decides what support the group will get, and focuses the group members' energies on what they really do best. You get to shape the direction of your group and influence the growth of your own practice.*
- *I want to diversify firm leadership worldwide. If I'm in a leadership role with a lot of influence, I'll be better positioned to do it.*

§ 11:2 Increase your self-awareness

If your success is not on your own terms, if it looks good to the world but does not feel good in your heart, it is not success at all.

—Anna Quindlen

You have to do what's good for you. No one else can do it. Ultimately, your life is your own, and you have to decide what you want that life to be. You will have to make choices repeatedly and to make smart choices requires understanding what is really important to you—not what others think you should want, or what you feel you *should* want, but what genuinely gives you pleasure, gets you intellectually and emotionally excited, makes you happy, gives your life meaning, and brings you serenity. To know this requires introspection that makes you acutely conscious of your core values. As you build your life and career, these values become the foundation for your decisions.

The more aware you are of your values the more effective you can be in making career and leadership decisions and in being a successful leader. In general, lawyers do not place great signifi-

cance on self-awareness when starting a developmental journey.¹ However, self-awareness is essential for authentic and successful leadership. It makes you better able to manage your own behavior, your expectations of other people, their expectations of you, and the way you relate to others. Being self-aware enables you to exert more control over your future and optimize your abilities. You become more agile in reacting to new situations, smarter about when and whom to ask for help, and able to find ways to complement and reduce your shortcomings. Without self-awareness, you miss opportunities that could give you great satisfaction. If you accept an unexamined life as your “default” mode, you will rely on what comes along and never know if you could be doing something better.

This holds true for any career woman but it is especially important if you hope to become a leader. Passive leadership is an inherent contradiction. As Will Rogers said, “Even if you’re on the right track, you’ll get run over if you just sit there.” If you wait to see what comes along, you might be lucky and land a dream job or a fabulous leadership position. However, you are at the mercy of others which limits your possibilities. Unless that appeals to you, you need to take control of your career. This means deciding what kind of career you want and then deliberately taking steps to achieve your desired future. When you know what you want and are ready to go after it, you will be able to find, create, and maximize advantageous opportunities. The sooner you start, the more time you will have to develop and execute a strategy, to make and correct mistakes, and to change your mind and shift direction if you are unhappy with your initial choices.

The journey to leadership requires careful analysis of your ambitions and values, developing a vision of your future as a leader, and finding the courage to achieve it. The first question to ask yourself is, “Is it important to me to be a leader?” Leadership can be stimulating, exciting, and highly rewarding, but to be effective as a leader, you must be highly motivated to lead. It is too hard and risky to do half-heartedly, so you should only do it if you genuinely want to and if you are committed to doing it well. If you do not have the drive to do it, do not enjoy it, or agree to do it out of a feeling of obligation rather than desire, it will take a great deal out of you with no corresponding reward. One leader

[Section 11:2]

¹Smith, R.B., & Marrow, P.B. (Sept. 2008), The changing nature of leadership in law firms, *NYSBA Journal*.

stated: *“I really love what I do. Otherwise it would be too much and I would quit.”*

If you are unsure whether you want to be a leader, consider what will happen to you if you stay where you are. You may be satisfied with your work and your status right now as a partner, counsel, associate, or in some other position. If the prospect of holding steady appeals to you, leadership may not seem like an important goal—at least for the time being. However, becoming a leader takes a while, and if you think you might want it some time in the future, it is best to start planning now. So think long-term: where do you want to be in three, five, or 10 years? The answer does not need to be very specific; you just need to know how much control you want over your career and how much influence you want in the firm. Some of the questions you might ask yourself to help you decide are in Table 11.1.

Table 11.1. Questions if you are undecided about leadership

- What will life be like for me in the future if I do not become a leader?
- Have I missed out on any opportunities because I am not a leader?
- What opportunities will be available to me if I become a leader?
- What benefits and advantages will I enjoy as a leader?
- What will be the costs—to my family and myself—if I move into leadership—or if I don’t?

Assuming you decide that you want to be a leader, the next question is, “Why is it important to me?” Being aware of and able to articulate your values, ambitions, and goals will help you envision what personal and career fulfillment will look like for you. You will be able to decide how being a leader will help you achieve your vision and what will be necessary to make it meaningful for you.

Once you understand why, you will be prepared to answer the next question: “How will I become the leader I want to be?” Your self-awareness will help you envision yourself as the leader you would like to be, assess your strengths and resources, and determine what path will help you achieve your objectives. Understanding your strengths will help you capitalize on them and compensate for any limitations. Understanding the resources you will need (e.g., time, assistants, sponsors, technology) will help you utilize those you have and figure out how to acquire

those you lack. As you travel along your path to leadership, not only will you make smarter choices with less anxiety, you will be more purposeful and successful in getting what you want in your personal life and your career.

A related and critical question is, “What is holding me back?” You will face impediments to your ambitions even after you reach leadership. They may be externally imposed or the result of conscious or unconscious internal processes. Some external constraints might relate to your personal situation such as family needs or health problems. Many other external barriers and constraints include an unpleasant work environment, gender bias, or work demands that you cannot meet. Gender bias is particularly insidious, because not only is it manifested in the way you are treated at work, you may also unconsciously internalize the limitations that it insinuates.

Many women hold fears, uncertainties, and doubts that prevent their actions from furthering their ambitions. Often unconscious, these feelings are manifested as both patterns of behavior and negative “self-talk”, i.e., messages that a woman tells herself that make her uncomfortable with ambition and reluctant to promote herself. These self-restraints form internal barriers to women’s successors. They include fear of failure or loss, ambivalence about her practice, or doubt about her abilities. She worries that she is not good enough, ready enough, or worthy enough to move into leadership; or she suffers from “imposter syndrome,” fearing that others will discover that she is not as smart or qualified as they seem to think. When she receives feedback that includes some criticism, she hears the message as negative and dwells on the minor critique even when the overall message is positive. When something goes wrong, her inner voice replays it repeatedly, intensifying her self-doubt.

These negative thoughts undermine a woman’s ability to be a leader. They “lead you to cooperate rather than initiate; produce but not invent; participate but not lead; reflect but not create.”² They keep you searching for external validation rather than relying on your own strengths and powers. Because these patterns cause you to compromise your ambitions and limit your contributions, they stop you from achieving your highest potential.

Most of the time, these self-limiting behaviors and thoughts can be overcome through self-awareness, planning, determination to move forward, and confidence-building support from friends or coaches. Sometimes just making yourself conscious of

²Austin (2000), *What’s holding you back?* at xxiii.

them deflates their power. From there, you can begin to recognize and take pride in your own talents, power, and wisdom; become your own champion; and harness the courage you need to move ahead.

If you do not face up to these self-restraints, they will prevent you from getting where you want to go. You may avoid choices and miss opportunities to assert your power and authority. You may hide behind excuses and accept lesser roles rather than soar to the great heights of which you are capable. However, if you acknowledge and deal with them, find confidence and security in yourself, and have a positive attitude, your strength and clarity of purpose can increase your resilience and bring you success.

§ 11:3 Articulate your values

Who you are, what your values are, what you stand for . . . they are your anchor, your north star. You won't find them in a book. You'll find them in your soul.

—Anne M. Mulcahy

Self-awareness requires an understanding of your most deeply held values. When you are passionate about what you do, your work is more enjoyable and fulfilling. In contrast, when your work is not aligned with your values, it increases your stress and depletes your energy. However, being clear about what matters most to you makes it easier for you to find and undertake leadership responsibilities that add meaning and purpose to your work and avoid or turn down those that do not. By choosing to do things that are aligned with your values you can reduce your stress and be more energetic and vigorous. You are happier and more effective because you move closer to achieving your highest aspirations. Katherine Graham, the first woman CEO of a Fortune 500 company, the Washington Post, said it well: “To love what you do and feel that it matters—how could anything be more fun?”

Many people who try to understand themselves begin by assessing their strengths and weaknesses, which is an important analysis and should be done. However, understanding your personal values is equally important and sometimes gets overlooked when people focus on their competencies. Finding our strengths is often easier than identifying our values. We need to know what we are good at to get our daily work done, so we tend to be more conscious of what our strengths are and fret over our deficiencies. Values do not always get the same degree of attention.

Values go deeper and are harder to articulate than strengths.

At times, we operate from values that are externally imposed—by family, the legal profession, or the community in which we live. The pressure to conform to external expectations drives many people to make choices that leave them unhappy or unsatisfied, even though they adapt and can perform their duties very well. When you are good at something, even if you feel ambivalent about doing it, you may characterize that strength as a value in order to justify your choices. For example, let's say you specialize in a field of law that bores you but is highly lucrative. You can still do a fine job as a lawyer, and your superior knowledge and performance may lead to further work in that area. You may feel pressured to stay in the field because the money is so good even though you do not enjoy it. However, how much happier would you be if you recognized and pursued the work you really love rather than remain shackled by golden handcuffs?

People are motivated by a myriad of values: wealth, fame, social responsibility, equality, justice, career success, family, autonomy, loyalty, having fun, just to name a few. Studies that seek to understand what values motivate women professionals and lawyers in particular come up with mixed results.¹ Some research finds that women place the highest value on flexibility while in other studies, that factor ranks lower than values like high quality work, making a difference, being challenged, and authenticity.

There are many books and instruments available to help you identify and prioritize your values. Table 11.2 presents one such tool, a list of personal values.² You may add to the list any other values that you hold. Review the listed values and consider how important each one is to you; then choose the four or five values that you hold most dear. The values you choose as “very important,” and especially those you rate as the top values within that group, will reflect what is important to you at this moment in your life and can provide useful insight as you craft your leadership strategy.

[Section 11:3]

¹Wittenberg-Cox, A., & Maitland, A. (2008) *Why women mean business: understanding the emergence of our next economic revolution* (John Wiley and Sons); Hewlett, S.A. (2007), *Off-ramps and on-ramps: keeping talented women on the road to success* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press); Harrington, M., & Hsi, H. (2007), *Women lawyers and obstacles to leadership: a report of MIT workplace center surveys on comparative career decisions and attrition rates of women and men in Massachusetts law firms*, MIT Workplace Center.

²Based on figure 4.1 from Lee, R.J., & King, S.N. (2001), *Discovering the leader in you: a guide to realizing your personal leadership potential* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/a Wiley Imprint). Adapted and republished by permission.

Table 11.2. Personal Values

Categorize the values below into three groups: *Less Important*, *Important*, and *Very Important*. Then reduce those in your *Very Important* list to your top four or five values. Add to the list any other values that you prize.

Achievement—a sense of accomplishment, mastery, goal attainment

Activity—fast-paced, highly active work

Advancement—growth, seniority, and promotion resulting from work well done

Adventure—new and challenging opportunities, excitement, risk

Aesthetics—appreciation of the beauty in things, ideas, surroundings, personal space

Affiliation—interaction with other people; recognition as a member of a particular group; involvement, belonging

Affluence—high income, financial success, prosperity

Authority—position and power to control events and other people's activities

Autonomy—ability to act independently with few constraints; self-sufficiency; self-reliance; ability to make most decisions and choices

Balance—lifestyle that allows balancing of time for self, family, work, and community

Challenge—continually facing complex and demanding tasks and problems

Change and Variation—absence of routine; work responsibilities, daily activities, or settings that change frequently; unpredictability

Collaboration—close, cooperative working relations with people

Community—serving and supporting a purpose that supersedes personal desires, making a difference

Competence—demonstrating high proficiency and knowledge; showing above-average effectiveness and efficiency at tasks

Competition—rivalry, with winning as the goal

Courage—willingness to stand up for one's beliefs

Creativity—discovering, developing, or designing new ideas, formats, programs, or things; demonstrating innovation and imagination

Duty—respect for authority, rules, and regulations

Economic Security—steady and secure employment, adequate financial reward, low risk

Enjoyment—fun, joy, and laughter

Fame—prominence, being well known

Family—spending time with partner, children, parents, or extended family

Friendship—close personal relationships with others

Health—physical and mental well-being, vitality

Helping Others—helping people attain their goals; providing care and support

Humor—the ability to laugh at oneself and life

Influence—having an impact or effect on the attitudes or opinions of other people; persuasiveness

Inner Harmony—happiness, contentment, being at peace with oneself

Integrity—acting in accordance with moral and ethical standards; honesty, sincerity, truth; trustworthiness

Justice—fairness, equality, doing the right thing

Knowledge—the pursuit of understanding; skill and expertise; continuous learning

Location—choice of a place to live that is conducive to one's lifestyle

Love—involvement in close, affectionate relationships; intimacy

Loyalty—faithfulness; dedication to individuals, traditions, or organizations

Order—stability, routine, predictability; clear lines of authority; standardized procedures

Personal Development—dedication to maximizing one's potential

Physical Fitness—staying in shape through exercise and physical activity

Recognition—positive feedback and public credit for work well done; respect and admiration

Responsibility—dependability, reliability, accountability for results

Self-respect—pride, self-esteem, sense of personal identity

Spirituality—strong spiritual or religious beliefs; moral fulfillment

Status—being respected for one's job or one's association with a prestigious group or organization

Wisdom—sound judgment based on knowledge, experience, and understanding

Additional values:

Most of the leaders who were interviewed for this book held values that were directed at improving the firm through their ability to influence goals and drive results. One value they shared was the desire for a more diverse workplace. Many of the interviewed leaders also held values that were related to personal achievement, such as a desire for validation and increased self-esteem through leadership recognition, or the exhilaration that comes with power. A few women said that making a lot of money was vital; others considered money less important, not an end in itself, but a symbol of respect and value. These leaders' firm-oriented and personal achievement goals sometimes appeared incompatible, but the women were able to reconcile them, often through trade-offs. For example, some stepped down from management roles for periods of time to build up their books of business, after which they returned to positions of leadership.

The values you hold will be reflected in what you do as a leader, so being clear about your values helps you maneuver through the conflicts and complexities of your job. As lawyers, we are led to believe that rational thought and analytical processes are the best way to approach any question or dilemma. Scientific research, however, shows that emotional and rational processes are closely intertwined and that both aspects of the brain are involved in decision-making.³ It shows the power of intuitive approaches based on experience and deeply held values. Many situations you face as a leader will test your values, and your decisions will be affected as much or more by those values than by reasoned analysis. Your values influence your priorities and what gets your attention, the people and positions you support and oppose, and your leadership choices and actions. If your values are not aligned with what you are doing as a leader, the tension will make it harder for you to act. If, for example, you place great value on autonomy, and your firm is moving to a practice model

³Lehrer, J. (2009), *How we decide* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt); Pink, D.H. (2006), *A whole new mind* (New York: Riverhead Books).

that emphasizes teamwork, you may have trouble persuading your colleagues to be more collaborative.

Core values generally remain constant, although some may change over time as your personal views and circumstances change. Accumulating wealth may be most important to you at 30, but at 60, shaping your legacy may take precedence. If you have accumulated enough wealth by then, or if a life event leads you to believe that there are more important things than being rich, you may choose to pursue activities that are more generative, such as mentoring and teaching young lawyers.

Sometimes, your values hold steady, but come into conflict, and you have to make choices that reorder their priority. When you are young and unattached, you may have a driving passion to succeed, enjoy what you do, and place the highest value on becoming a successful lawyer no matter how hard or how late you have to work. Should you decide to have children or need to care for a sick relative, you may devote less time to work, and your career may take a back seat for a while. You might also change where and how you manifest the same value at different times in your career. If serving the community is important to you, you might do a lot of pro bono work during the early part of your career, and at another point take a more active role on community boards or in politics. One of the leaders I interviewed took great solace in work when she became a widow. Her law practice had always been important to her but her husband's death made it more central.

§ 11:4 Appreciate your strengths

If we did all the things we are capable of, we would literally astound ourselves.

— Thomas A. Edison

You can only achieve true excellence by applying your strengths, so you need to be clear about what they are. Self-awareness includes being conscious of the particular characteristics that make you a good leader or hinder your effectiveness. Appreciating your leadership strengths and limitations allows you to choose the smartest approaches for moving into leadership and increases your effectiveness once in the role. You can select assignments, work environments, and activities that bring out the best in you and use your strengths to produce optimal results. One leader knew she had trouble in a particular area: *“It’s hard for me to read people. I’m really bad at it. So I quit being on the hiring committee. I wasn’t very good at making selections and found it boring.”* She opted for other leadership positions where

she could use the management strengths she did have. Exploring your strengths means taking a personal inventory of your gifts and learning to trust your wisdom.

One of your early decisions will be which path to leadership suits you best. Are you charismatic? Does your outgoing personality draw clients and others to you? Do you enjoy schmoozing, going to meetings, and having conversations with people; or would you rather deal with numbers than people, and with analyzing issues in a brief, rather than in a committee meeting? If you have strong preferences or dislikes, it may influence your choice of leadership through rainmaking, management, or some other path. Several women leaders realized at some point in their career that they were not doing what they were best at. One prominent leader started out as a litigator. When she found herself crying at work every night, she decided litigation was not for her and switched to the business department, where she soon became a top lawyer and highly successful rainmaker. Another woman left practice altogether: *“After so many years of practice, I thought, is this really me? And I stepped away from practice and into a full time management role in my firm.”*

Knowing yourself is important for law firm leaders because of the tensions inherent in the job. Without a self-aware and solid grounding in your personal values and abilities, the constant pushes and pulls of leadership can be grueling. Leadership in a law firm requires a set of complex, seemingly contradictory skills. To be a leader, you need a high IQ and high EQ (emotional intelligence); you need to be devoted to your own success and to helping others succeed; you have to be hands-on and a good delegator, decisive and consultative, detail-oriented and a big-picture thinker, analytical and empathetic, a 24/7 worker, and someone who is balanced. Lawyers with all these qualities are extremely rare, so how can you live up to your followers’ expectations? You can only manage their expectations if you know your best self.

Awareness of your preferred leadership roles and your favored leadership styles helps you recognize when they work well and when they are counterproductive. With this knowledge, you can utilize them when they are most effective but also learn other styles that will expand your repertoire and give you greater versatility. Knowing and being comfortable with your abilities enables you to know what interests you and what you find tedious; what you do with little effort and what is strenuous or frustrating; what you need to learn and how you can best learn it; and what draws people to you and what drives them away. This self-knowledge strengthens your ability to lead and helps you withstand the pressures of the job. When work presents

obstacles or gets you down, being confident of your abilities enables you to meet the challenges and go on without letting self-doubt derail you.

Recognizing what you are good at in a leadership position can also help you focus your attention on what you need to learn and improve and when to seek appropriate help. Knowing you have low energy levels or have a hard time speaking in front of a group may put some leadership positions out of reach—unless you find ways to build up your stamina or improve your public speaking skills. Knowing that you are a big-picture, strategic thinker who hates details or is bad with numbers may lead you to recruit people to your leadership team who complement these shortcomings.

To help you discover your strengths, look for patterns at work, in the activities and projects where you have succeeded and at those that have not worked out. Analyze them and see if you can spot recurring factors that seem to work for and against you. It is helpful to get feedback from others about what you are good at, which may not be exactly what you think. Ask someone you trust to give you their assessment and compare it with your own. You might also find it useful to hire a coach to conduct a 360 review or ask trusted colleagues and clients about their perception of your leadership talents. Most people are pleased when you ask for feedback and glad to help you improve your leadership capabilities and performance.

Keep in mind that what you consider your strength as a lawyer may not be helpful to you as a leader. Leading a client team and leading an office, practice group, or law firm are very different exercises. For instance, as a lawyer, being a detail-oriented perfectionist is valued because clients and colleagues can rely on you to do a careful and thorough job. However, as a leader, perfectionism can undercut your effectiveness. In a leadership role, you are running a business, dealing with people and emotions, sometimes having to make quick decisions, and engaging in sensitive communications when crises arise. You do not have the luxury of studying every issue in painstaking detail or worrying about the perfect language or ideal solution. Even if you have considerable experience leading client teams or complex client matters, when you transition into firm leadership, you have to shift your thinking and utilize a different set of skills.

Table 11.3¹ shows some of the differences between leading a team on a client matter and leading partners in a law firm. In handling a client matter, the client's needs and objectives control the way you manage the matter. That matter has a beginning and an end as the deal is concluded or the case results in a verdict or settlement. Within the team, there is a clear hierarchy of authority, with the partner in charge making key decisions, and particular tasks being delegated down along the line. Information and decisions can be communicated efficiently to all members of the team through e-mail, memos, occasional meetings, and conferences. Likewise, the partner in charge is clearly accountable to the client for the work and its outcome.

TABLE 11.3. Comparing Client Team Leadership with Law Firm Leadership

<u>Client Team Leadership</u>	<u>Law Firm Leadership</u>
Client sets objectives	Group creates objectives
Beginning and end	No clear beginning or end
Accepted hierarchy	Partners question authority
Efficient communication	Inefficient communication
Clear accountability	Unclear accountability

Leading a law firm or group within the firm is far more ambiguous and complicated. The dynamics of leadership, including the difficulty of leading leaders, is discussed in Chapter 7. While some leadership positions may be for designated terms, others are open-ended. Problems and projects may have no specific time frame; indeed, for reasons discussed earlier, generating change in a law firm may take many months or years without clear resolution. The leader's authority is constantly being questioned, and leaders are frequently powerless to pressure partners to act. Because the process of leading is political, is based on individual relationships, and requires walking the halls to persuade partners and build consensus, the communication process takes a great deal of time and effort and is extremely inefficient. Likewise, while leaders may ultimately be accountable to their partners, the nature and implications of that accountability are often unclear.

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¹Adapted and published with permission from Tim Leishman, Firm Leader Inc.

Being a woman may on occasion turn out to be one of your strengths. Many women use their gender to their advantage when others underestimate or patronize them because they are women. You may not like it but don't be afraid to use it. Being the only woman in the room may make you uncomfortable, but it also makes you memorable and distinctive and enables you to call attention to yourself or your client's position.

§ 11:5 Create your vision

A vision is not just a picture of what could be; it is an appeal to our better selves, a call to become something more.

— Rosabeth Moss Kanter

To bring your ambitions to life, you have to be able to articulate a vision of what you hope your life will be. That vision, based on your values, ambitions, and strengths, will enable you to determine where you can make your greatest contribution as a leader. It will allow you to focus your energy on what is most important to you. Throughout your career, you will have opportunities that arouse various degrees of interest, excitement, and discomfort; some will be a result of careful planning while others may be completely unexpected, a matter of luck, or being in the right place at the right time. When you have a clear vision of what is important to you and where you are heading, you can better evaluate and select among the leadership options that you encounter along the way. You can calculate the trade-offs; decide what to accept, decline, avoid, or pursue; and negotiate from strength and conviction. Instead of wasting your energy on trivial concerns and insignificant pursuits, you can maintain your vitality and drive toward the goals you have set.

When your values, ambitions, and strengths are clear to you, it becomes easier to envision your ideal future and figure out how to get there. Anna Fels wrote that “The first step in creating a future is to imagine it.”¹ There are so many possibilities! Little is mapped out for you. When you are mired in the daily responsibilities of work and life, it is hard to think about a larger vision. When you step back and contemplate all the possibilities, you may feel overwhelmed. However, actively envisioning what you want the future to be and how you will achieve it gives you a sense of agency and control over your life. The things that are genuinely and profoundly important to you become the founda-

[Section 11:5]

¹Fels (2005), *Necessary dreams*, p. xvi.

tion upon which you hone your skills, strengthen your leadership abilities, build your confidence, and make wise leadership choices. As you work on developing your personal vision, ask yourself:

- What is important to me?
- What do I want to become in my personal and professional life?
- Do I enjoy being a leader? Am I good at it? Does it feel natural? Does it energize me?
- What kind of leader do I want to be?
- How will being a leader help me become the person I want to be?

Defining your vision requires giving yourself time, distance, and emotional space, as well as purposeful effort. You work awfully hard at your profession. You undoubtedly do excellent work and already enjoy some success whether or not you think about what you are passionate about, what drives you, and what makes all that hard work worthwhile. Once you know what those things are, then instead of working just for an income, doing what clients and partners expect of you, or plugging along for some other undefined reason, you can put your vision to work for you. You can create a plan based on that vision that will help you define and achieve success on your own terms.

Defining your success will also open your eyes to the trade-offs that may be necessary and help you decide which compromises you are and are not willing to make. For instance, current law firm career tracks assume that lawyers will work full-time, consistently, and without interruption. If you work less or drop out for a while, then the odds are you will advance more slowly than your peers. If your vision is to have a family and become a leader in your firm, you will have to make choices. Some of those choices will be constrained by your firm's culture and policies and your home situation; some will be negotiable, and others will not. The clearer you are about what matters most to you, the clearer your choices will be. That doesn't mean it will be easy, but you will appreciate the likely costs and be able to decide which you will accept and which are too great and must be rejected. You will be the person calling the shots to shape your future.

Regardless of what you decide, remember that there are no perfect values or paths. Anthropologist Ruth Benedict said that "The trouble with life is not that there is no answer, it's that there are so many answers." Every woman's values, vision of leadership, and the way she chooses to achieve it are very personal. What is important for you is to be able to use your ambitions, values, and strengths as assets to help you form a vision of leadership and achieve your leadership goals.

CASE STUDY: Envisioning Success

Mary Cranston of Pillsbury Winthrop, the first woman to chair a global law firm, often describes her journey and the steps she took to create and achieve her leadership vision. She sets out four principles for aspiring leaders:

1. *Get clear on career and personal goals that resonate with you.*
2. *Find the courage to believe that nothing will stop you.*
3. *Do not stop until you get there.*
4. *Once you accomplish your initial goals, set new goals that add greater meaning to your life.*

Getting to the point where she could have a clear vision of the leader she wanted to be required considerable self-study. Mary describes the process as “watching her thoughts,” bringing her biases, fears, and ambitions to consciousness so that she could understand and address them. An initial step was to distinguish between what she really wanted to do and what she thought she *should* do. Recognizing that she had been socialized to become a “good girl” and live according to the prevailing expectations for women, she had to reprogram her thinking to eliminate thoughts that might limit or sabotage her leadership prospects. She accepted the fact that she enjoyed competition, winning, and building new things, and that pursuing those strengths was not self-ish, but served the greater good of the firm. Once she did that, she was able to envision herself as a top litigator and formidable rainmaker with a \$10 million book of business.

Then she had to muster the courage to achieve that vision. She had to overcome the “million unconscious reasons why these goals were impossible.” She had to face up to her fears that she didn’t have the skills to do it, and that success would take up all her time and hurt her family. To overcome these negative thoughts, she adopted a more positive frame of mind, looking for possibilities, not obstacles. She convinced herself that she really could do it. She learned to say no to assignments that did not support her goals. When things did not work out well, she found meaning in failure. There were stumbles along the way, but she took small steps every day that moved her in the direction she had set; and she kept at it relentlessly until she achieved her vision.

Having attained the professional success she had defined, Mary discovered that achieving career goals was not a source of fulfillment in her life. There are always new goals and the journey is never ending. Her career was always very important to her, but her top priorities were and remain family first, friends second, and career third. Maintaining her health and serving her com-

munity round out her priorities. Mary resets her goals around these five priorities every year and carves out time for all of them.

