



# Developing Leaders

## What Qualities Make a Great Leader?

By Robert J. Kopka and Robert M. Milane

**A**s we reflect upon the importance of leadership in our companies, law firms and organizations, we cannot help but draw inspiration from General George Fay's keynote address on personal courage during the 2012 Claims and Litigation Management Alliance (CLM) Annual Conference. It may seem incongruous to discuss personal courage in the context of

claims handling or law firm management, but great leadership stems from moral clarity and consistency irrespective of the type of organization being led. We think of personal courage as necessarily preceded by some moral dilemma — a decision involving the conduct of war or illegal corporate behavior — but personal courage is really the consistent display of honesty and fairness in every aspect of your work. People want to

be inspired in their work. People need to feel good about what they do. Therefore, the very first quality of a great leader is personal courage.

The CLM National Committee, consisting of law firm and corporate leaders, is dedicated to raising the quality of leadership at all levels of CLM. We hope we can teach, learn and inspire CLM Members and Fellows alike to raise the quality of leadership in our



organizations and thereby, add a measure of success.

Outstanding leaders appeal to the hearts, not the minds of their followers. Those of us who try cases know how true that is. Juries will always follow their hearts, so why would we expect anything different from our colleagues at work? John Quincy Adams wrote, “If your actions inspire others to dream more, to learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.” Effective leaders will inspire those they lead. How, then, to inspire? People are inspired to work for a firm or a company that has a clearly articulated purpose that goes beyond mere profitability. Disney Company’s articulated corporate purpose is “to bring happiness to millions by keeping alive the magic of

childhood.” Four Seasons Hotel and Resorts articulates its core purpose as “to treat others as you wish to be treated.” Leadership, then, starts with a clearly articulated core purpose of the organization, one that appeals to the values of its employees. It should be something beyond mere growth or profitability. It is meant to inspire. It may involve service, innovation or professionalism. In developing a corporate purpose, a good leader will talk to his or her employees and seek their input, and then match their input to his or her vision.

Of course, once these core values are articulated, they must be consistently applied. Enron’s core values were: communication, excellence, respect and integrity. It published a 64-page manual on the company’s mission and core values, including its ethical policies, which became evidence in the fraud trial of its executives. Its core values were words on a page. Core values that do not apply to everyone or that are not consistently applied will ruin an organization.

Consistency is also a key component of leadership. The best leaders have the personal courage to fix rules that apply to everyone and are consistent in the application of those rules. People are inspired by fairness. Leaders must develop a vision for the organization, articulate the vision and develop practices and procedures, applicable to everyone, which befit the corporate purpose. This is not to suggest that everyone must be treated equally, rather, that the rules be applied fairly. By setting rules that are fairly applied and build toward a shared purpose, employees are empowered and, yes, inspired to excel.

Finally, leaders place the right people in the right jobs doing the right things. When inspired by a valuable corporate purpose and empowered by fairly applied rules and practices, your followers will surprise you with their results. Dwight D. Eisenhower said, “Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something

you want done because he wants to do it.” How true that is. Leaders must have the cooperation and, indeed, the dogged determination and ingenuity of excellent employees, from executives to clerical staff. Does it not seem obvious that employees will excel when they are inspired by a clearly articulated corporate purpose, working in an environment that is perceived to be fair and equitable and in which each employee is empowered to use his or her creativity toward the fulfillment of a shared value?

Leaders allow others to innovate, to work independently and together, to criticize and to modify, to find their own voices in the common goals of the organization. Leaders correct rather than blame. Leaders challenge employees with questions rather than direct every aspect of the job. Leaders apply the rules to everyone fairly, and by doing so, inspire loyalty. Leaders take more of the blame and give more of the credit than may be fair, but by doing so, they assure persistence, pluck and purpose. These, in turn, lead to success.

This year, the National Committee of CLM will embark on an examination of the role of leadership in all aspects of our work. We encourage dialogue and sharing of best practices and look forward to enriching ourselves and each of you in your work. Leadership begins when each of us displays the personal courage to seek to improve ourselves and our organizations. Whether you lead a company, a department, a practice group or a small unit, you can make a big difference by the display of personal courage in your outlook and in your deeds. By the way, the last quote comes not from a well-known leader, but speaks to another quality of a true leader:

*“If you obey all the rules, you miss all the fun.”* — Katherine Hepburn [LM](#)

*Robert J. Kopka is the Managing Partner of Kopka, Pinkus, Dolin & Eads. Robert M. Milane is the Lead Claims Counsel for Canal Insurance.*