

## 3 Reasons Why Being A Good Lawyer Just Isn't Enough

By **John Kennedy**

*Law360, New York (July 26, 2016, 8:18 PM ET)* -- A good lawyer is often viewed as someone with a record of understanding and using the law to his or her client's advantage, but in today's industry, an exceptional knowledge of the law alone just doesn't cut it, experts say.

"More than any skill, we are paid for our judgment," said Lynne Liberato, a partner at Haynes and Boone LLP. "Development of good judgment requires broad-based experience, not merely knowledge of the law."

Modern clients prefer "complete lawyers" — those who know the ins and outs of their clients' businesses, work well with others, and understand the economics that underlie the business of law, experts say.

"Being a good lawyer is nice, it's helpful, but if you can't be a businessperson, if you can't understand how you have to behave, if you can't deal with the technology, you can't do this anymore," said Patrick J. Cotter of Greensfelder Hemker & Gale PC.

"If you can do all these other things, and you're just an adequate lawyer, you're going to ultimately probably do better than a really good lawyer who can't do these things," he added.

When it's all said and done, an attorney in today's legal industry needs a bevy of skills to stay ahead of the game.

### **You Have To Know Your Client's Business Inside And Out**

Although the legal industry has changed since she first went to work nearly 30 years ago, one constant is that intimate knowledge of a client's business comes into play every single day, according to Karen G. Johnson-McKewan, a partner at Orrick Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP.

"You have to understand what keeps them up at night, but also how to help them sell a solution to their problem internally," she said.

"Understanding your client's business and understanding what works and what doesn't for them is perpetual knowledge you just need to have at your fingertips and on your mind on a constant basis," she added.

Clients have long sought lawyers who know their business and the cultural forces at work within that business, experts say.

It takes time to collect this knowledge, as lawyers must learn the craft, the issues and how to recognize patterns, all while constantly thinking about the business aspects of the job, says Jonathan K. Henderson, managing partner for Polsinelli PC's Dallas office.

"It's always been about knowing more than just the law — it's always been about being more of a well-rounded adviser," Henderson said. "If you prioritize becoming a really good lawyer, but at the same time you're paying attention to business, and paying attention to finance, and paying attention to the functional areas of the business, then you'll be a better adviser when all that matches up in the future."

### **You Have To Know Your Own Business, Too**

Knowing the economics behind the business of law, including how to bring in your own clients and how to quickly assess the value of a case, is key, experts say.

"Lawyers must be able to understand internal law firm economics, so that they can simultaneously meet clients' needs, do so at reasonable costs and within their clients' budgets, and attract and retain top talent within their firms," said Amie Peele Carter, a partner at Faegre Baker Daniels LLP.

Although there's still a place in every firm for the "lawyer's lawyer" who can quote every case, attorneys are less able to be that person in the modern industry, experts say, because that person doesn't always have a client following or referral sources.

"Today you have to be able to bring in your own clients," Cotter said. "The best lawyer in the world isn't ever going to be really successful or be a leader by just working on other people's clients."

Furthermore, with the ever-increasing cost of litigation, it's necessary that lawyers analyze the risk of each case, because a client may not be able to, or be willing to, pay for an extended case, Cotter says.

"Cases can explode at any moment," Cotter said. "When that happens, the lawyer who can't put a value on it and get a pretty good sense of what it's going to cost is just going to get ruined."

### **You Have To Collaborate**

In the past, a lawyer could be cantankerous, eccentric or rude, but as long as they brought in a lot of money, firms would tolerate such behavior — something that "just doesn't fly anymore," Cotter said.

"If you can't act appropriately, you're a huge liability now. You're just a bomb waiting to go off in the middle of the law firm," he said.

Lawyers are more than likely going to be working alongside many other people, whether it's a client's general counsel, colleagues within their own firm or attorneys at other firms, says Jerry S. Goldman of Anderson Kill PC.

"Good lawyers know when to check the ego by the door," he said.

"Somebody's not going to be able to excel at everything, and that's why collaboration is important," he

added. "That doesn't mean that you're not going to be a hard-nosed adversary when you negotiate."

Leah Sears Ward, a retired chief justice for the Georgia Supreme Court who's now a partner at Schiff Hardin LLP, says she's seen talented lawyers hurt themselves with their inability to work with others.

"I can't tell you how many lawyers in the last few years I've met who were smart, top-tier attorneys, but whose career opportunities have been limited because of their inability to deal with people in emotionally mature, moral, reasonable, respectful and constructive ways," she said.

"Having this kind of emotional intelligence is critical for the 21st century lawyer."

--Editing by Rebecca Flanagan and Kelly Duncan.

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