

Michael Elkin on the 5 Skills All Partners Need to Develop

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Law360 recently published an interview with several successful attorneys on the five skills all partners need to develop as they navigate their career. Winston's New York office managing partner Michael Elkin was one of attorneys who shared his perspective.

First, the five skills the attorneys agreed that partners need to work on are:

1. Building Relationships
2. Developing Talent
3. Crafting Your Practice
4. Staying Ahead of the Curve
5. Fostering a Balanced Outlook

For Mr. Elkin, who also serves as chair of the firm's copyright, entertainment, and digital media practice, talent management and crafting one's practice are particularly critical.

Concerning talent management, Mr. Elkin suggests that helping to ensure that a firm has a good relationship with associates can be crucial to both individual and firm development.

"Make sure [associates] feel like they are part of the team," Mr. Elkin said. "It reduces attrition, especially with respect to good associates you want to retain."

He added that one reason to retain good associates is to impress clients, who are often aware that a lot of the work is done at that level.

But, while he did emphasize the importance of associates, much of Mr. Elkins' focus was on partners, who should be committed to "grafting a profile" by attending conferences, participating in speaking engagements, and publishing articles on practice-specific topics.

“Law firms are not monoliths,” he said. “They’re comprised of living, breathing organisms called ‘partners’ with a matrix of their own contacts and clients.”

Mr. Elkin also touched on the harmony required between a partner’s practice and the overall goals of the firm. For instance, if partners examine their own portfolio of contacts and clients, and look at how they spend time developing work, it can help sculpt their practice so that the work being developed fits the firm’s objectives.

“Figure out your skills and experiences and how that fits and morphs into the law firm,” he said.

Lastly, Mr. Elkin offered that, to be a successful partner, one must know what decisions the law firm is making and ride the wave they create.

“In the competitive world of big firm practice, if you have what it takes to get the brass ring, you should be able morph your practice in a way that is consonant with your firm’s business environment and expectations,” he said.

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