The SCALA Scoop

JULY 2010 VOLUME 49

FROM THE PRESIDENT

It's summer time! And a busy one at that! Our June 10 "ALA Conference in Review" was a success. Thanks to the presenters for providing a good overview of the annual conference in Boston.

Clara Godshall, our President-Elect, attended the Chapter Leadership Institute (CLI) in Las Vegas on June 25-27. CLI is a chapter management orientation, training, and networking event for chapter officers and leaders. Thanks to Clara for representing our chapter.

Our Vendor Fair and Educational Session will be held on Thursday, August 19, at the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center. Please plan to attend the education session from 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. Dick Nigon, CFO of Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi LLP in Minneapolis and former ALA President, will be presenting "Where is the Tipping Point When Cutting Expenses to Increase Profits?" The session is open to both administrators and vendors. There will be a drawing during the education session for two SCALA members to receive scholarships to the ALA Region 2 meeting in Miami on October 22-23, 2010.

The Vendor Fair will run from 4:00 to 6:30 p.m. and provides good opportunities for administrative decision-makers in your firms to interact with our vendors. Please invite attorneys, accountants, librarians, firm administrators, human resource professionals, and MIS professionals within your firms to attend. Remember that the vendors are at the leading edge of knowledge for their respective products and services. This event is an excellent opportunity to become more informed about products and trends that will enhance the quality of services for your organizations.

As you can see, this is a busy summer! I look forward to seeing you on August 19 at the Vendor Fair and Educational Session. In the meantime, stay cool!

Jane Todd
President, 2010 - 2011

SC Chapter News

SCALA Annual Vendor Fair:
A Decade of Partnership!

The South Carolina Chapter of the Association of Legal Administrators (SCALA) will host our Tenth Annual Vendor Fair at the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center on Thursday, August 19, 2010. This event brings together administrative decision-making individuals from South Carolina law & CPA firms and selected vendors that serve our region. Attorneys, accountants, firm administrators, paralegals, human resources and MIS professionals and office management representatives are all encouraged to attend.

EVENT SCHEDULE
2:30—3:30 p.m. Educational Session
4:00—6:30 p.m. Vendor Hall

For registration information, please see our chapter website at: www.scalanet.org or contact Carol Cummings, SCALA Vendor Relations Chair, at: CUMMINGS@rtt-law.com.

Vendor Fair Educational Session:
Where is the Tipping Point When Cutting Expenses to Increase Profits?

RIchard Nigon

Law firms and vendors alike have been forced to make reductions in all areas including staff support. What is the financial benefit of cutting expenses that were ignored during prosperous times and focusing on the remaining star performers during lean times? This session will address the perils of operating on a shoestring budget. Sometimes reducing expenses beyond the tipping point translates into losses in productivity and morale.

- Assess the cost-benefit of cutting expenses and staff, and the actual savings
- Evaluate the possible unintended consequences of making changes for the sole purpose of cost savings
- Determine which cost-cutting measures will allow your firm to remain stable in a down economy and also will lead your firm to profitability as the economy improves

Richard J. Nigon, CLM, is the CFO of Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi L.L.P. in Minneapolis. He has more than 20 years of law firm finance experience and is a frequent presenter at ALA conferences and chapter meetings. A former ALA President, Richard is also the 2009 recipient of the prestigious "Spirit of ALA" Award.

LET'S HEAR IT FOR OUR VENDOR PARTNERS!

By Vicky Berry

Have you ever considered a vendor to be a partner in your Firm? I don't mean an actual "owner," but an integral member of the team that enables your Firm to perform an outstanding job for your clients. For example, do you recall the last time you drove to a courthouse to file a document? Or when you last transcribed a deposition, shopped for office supplies, retrieved copies of medical records or served a subpoena? And, I bet that drafting a space plan, watering and caring for plants or preparing lunch for a partner meeting have probably (and gratefully) not been on your "to do" list lately. The myriad of services provided by our vendor partners to our Firms is astounding. Their services and support are instrumental in assisting law firms around the world succeed.

In 2001, I was asked to accomplish the near impossible task of opening a branch office in less than two weeks' time in a territory that was unfamiliar to me: Dallas, Texas. The potential for success was minimal; the potential for disaster was monumental. Upon my arrival in Dallas, I was offered a conference room as my temporary office at our Commercial Real Estate Broker's office. The first two telephone calls were placed to local ALA members who provided me with extensive vendor lists. The long lists were whittled down and over the course of the next few days I successfully hired numerous qualified vendors.

In this particular example, it was the Dallas local area vendors, with their expertise and knowledge that allowed our Firm's Dallas office to open on schedule: April 2, 2001. This is despite the fact that one local vendor and his crew worked through the night to replace furniture which fell off a truck in route to the new office in an incredible rainstorm! Most of the original Dallas vendor partners are still providing services to the office after four years.

The legal community requires its vendors to have a proven expertise. Our engagement of vendors is tantamount to hiring a highly- skilled, trained, knowledgeable member of our team. References are checked and potential vendors are asked to prove that they can "talk the talk AND walk the walk." We are extremely grateful for their innovative ideas and entrepreneurial vision. Thus, we do not have to reinvent the wheel, but rather can rely on vendors to help us as we strive to run our offices seamlessly, efficiently, cost effectively and successfully.

As a member of the ALA National Vendor Relations Committee I have been afforded the opportunity to meet with national, regional and local vendors who provide services to law firms around the world. The Committee's primary focus is to facilitate communication among vendors, ALA international, ALA regions and ALA chapters as well as provide a resource for member and vendor feedback. Prior to my work with this Committee, I served as the Regional Projects Officer in Region 6 and as President of the Orange County Chapter where I had numerous opportunities to speak to our partners — ALA's sponsoring vendors. Unfortunately, many of our vendors voiced a concern about the difficulties they encounter when attempting to have an audience with an Administrator.

ALA's vendor partners play an intricate role in assisting our Firms (and us) to provide the excellent service our clients, attorneys and staff expect. They

LET'S HEAR IT FOR OUR VENDOR PARTNERS!

(Continued…)

are kind and generous sponsors of ALA at national, regional and local levels. Vendors contribute incredible support (time and funds) to assist our organization provide educational opportunities to its membership at all levels.

But we all know there is "NEVER" a good time to receive a call from a vendor because as Administrators, we are always in the middle of putting out a fire. So with fire extinguisher in hand, the phone rings and guess who — it is an unknown vendor on the line. I put my extinguisher down, take a deep breath and try to gracefully switch my hat from firewoman to administrator again all in one split second to speak to the caller. At the same time another unsolicited e-mail message appears on my screen from yet another vendor. In lightening speed, I try to respond but do not always succeed. Interestingly enough, so many times over the years when I have taken the time to converse with a new vendor, saving money and providing excellent state of the art service has been the result for both my Firm and its clients.

The next time you receive a call or e- mail message from a vendor sponsor, I strongly encourage you to respond. By taking a moment and creating a partnership with them you may discover a product or service that will assist your Firm to remain on the cutting edge in this ever-changing legal industry.

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The SCALA Scoop

The "SCALA Scoop" is the newsletter of the Association of Legal Administrators, South Carolina Chapter, and is published 4-6 times per year and distributed to over 50 legal administrators, Business Partners and other legal professionals throughout South Carolina.

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Sharp Business Systems of South Carolina

Understanding Document Technology

"Documents are the vehicles in which information flows in and out of your business," says Tommy Pickens, "so it's a very important part what you do." But, says the president of Sharp Business Systems, it is often one that is overlooked.

Whether electronic or printed, Pickens says his team at Sharp Business Systems helps clients optimize the organization of document output. "We help control and manage cost and help improve efficiency."

Ken Stewart, director of Technology Solutions explains that though every business has a unique platform: a computer system that runs their mainframe and specific hardware and software tools, "We can help streamline the information flow and integrate it with a client's own business processes."

Document output makes up about 1-3% of a company's total revenue, according to a study from Gartner, Inc. with total cost for a document's entire lifecycle is on average 7.14%. Randy Bidwell, CRM manager notes that in a tough economic climate it makes good fiscal sense to manage such an important asset. Bidwell says Sharp Business Systems can maximize those assets with a three-step plan.

First – Inventory. "Many organizations don't even know what they have in terms of the number of devices or supplies," says Pickens noting that some continue to keep broken equipment as well as cabinets full of attendant inks and toners.

The dedicated project managers at Sharp not only take a total inventory

of what is on hand, but also identify the related cost of those devices through the whole life cycle of the doc, from creation of document to distribution and the impact of supplies, repairs, and help desk calls. Stewart says, "These assessments will tell you exactly what it costs to run everything you have."

Two – Strategy. Thorough evaluations are followed up with a conversation with the client to determine the executive level strategy for the business. "This must take place before we can make recommendations. We have to know their business goals," Steward says. The most cost-effective solutions do not often entail taking away most of the equipment. "That would be like taking all the exits but one off the highway," adds Pickens.

Three – Right sizing. Pickens says only about 10% of the document's cost is in output, the other 90% are soft costs related to storage, organization, etc. "We offer suggestions for right sizing your equipment fleet," he says. That includes determining the right number of devices and the right mix of capabilities. "This achieves cost savings and efficiency at the same time. It is all part of our program."

Sharp Business Services is there to be a partner to their clients. By outsourcing printer and copier maintenance to their specialists, business owners can avoid the productivity loss when equipment breaks and an employee must take the time to call a help desk. "It often costs the client a lot less to leave that responsibility to us," says Bidwell.

Even with this "outsourcing," Pickens reminds potential clients, "We are a part of Sharp Electronics Corporation, but we are still local and have a great reputation. Many of our representatives have been doing this for a decade or more, right here in the Upstate. Anyone can win a contract one time. We want a customer for a long time."

SHARP BUSINESS SYSTEMS

Sharp Business Systems
109 Hamby Drive
Greenville, SC 29615
(864) 675-2000

Job Coaching and Accountability: Lessons for Dusty

By Judy Hissong, CLM

Last time around we talked about Trusty and the difficulty getting to work on time. This issue we are discussing that assistant of yours who was responsible for the coffee. A quick recap:

Ever notice how playing the blame game hits all of us? First, your receptionist, Trusty, shows up late, but it's not his fault. The traffic was terrible. Then you learn the coffee is gone and the big firm deposition is starting in an hour. You talk with your assistant, Dusty, who is in charge of supplies, but it's not her fault, no one told her they used the last bag.

You sit back down at your desk and already your morning is making your smile become a frown. You ask yourself, 'How does this keep happening?' This discussion leads you to wonder if you have the right people in the right places, and the number of times you've experienced problems with both the supplies being out and the receptionist desk empty until 20 or 30 minutes after the office opens.

Stop. What if the problem is a little closer to home? Whoa. What if you are caught in the position of being nice to everyone, and holding no one accountable? Let me explain.

As an administrator you strive to be liked. You work hard to be perceived as fair, and as nice. And likely you are. That's fantastic. The difficulty is that a majority of the time we stop there. We are loved by all, feared by some, and abused by anyone who can get away with it! Do you know this feeling?

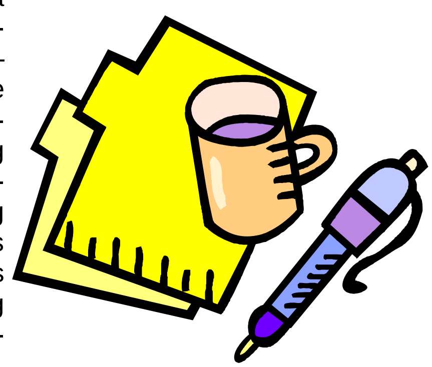
If so, it's time to develop a culture of accountability. And, the easiest way to do that is employing job coaching. It's time to shed the embracing of blame, and pass the responsibility to the firm back into the lap of the employee.

When you hire a new employee you explain the nuts and bolts of the position they are interviewing and/or accepting. You offer the very tangible description of the duties and the reporting lines, and now you also begin explaining that accepting this position is accepting a responsibility to the organization, to the firm in which you are being hired. You, as the manager of the business, are holding the accountability around this responsibility. Your employees are not responsible to you; they are responsible to the firm itself. You create the necessary tension for the tightrope that walks the employee between job responsibility and duty to the firm.

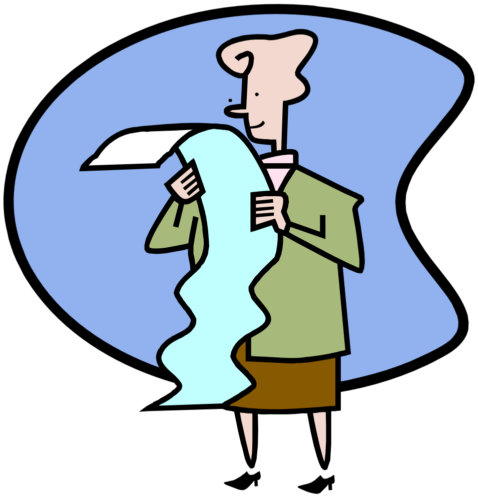
Now let's talk about Dusty. Dusty was hired when the floors of the firm were still dirt – she's been around forever. You didn't interview her with your technique of instilling responsibility and accountability in the hiring process. Now you are ready to introduce this concept to remedy a growing accountability issue around supplies.

You've sorted out the coffee crisis, only the most recent of several supply mishaps where you have had conversations about what is supposed to happen, and maybe even held a staff meeting to demand the staff report to Dusty when the last pencil is pulled from the cabinet. This conversation only bogs down productivity as you now have the entire staff assisting in Dusty's job. You decide to approach it differently this time, and bring Dusty into your office.

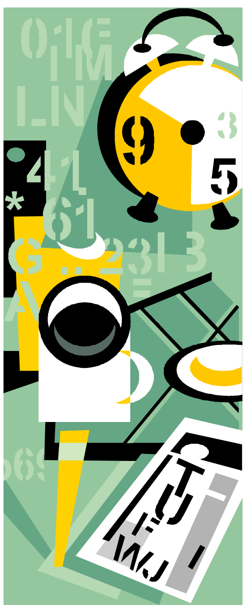
You begin with a curious awareness statement – something like this – "I'm noticing an increasing amount of difficulty in keeping our supplies stocked." It's merely naming what you're see-



ing, and isn't assessing judgment or putting Dusty on the defensive. Remember, the goal is to improve performance, and defensive behavior only stifles performance or causes complete shutdown. You now move to the open ended question, again with curiosity, "What solutions do you have to keeping our supplies stocked so that everyone has what they need for their job responsibilities?" Sit and wait for an answer. If the answer is, "I don't know", then my favorite response is, "What if you did know?" And wait.



Brainstorm with Dusty as you co-create a solution. Maybe Dusty suggests the staff be responsible for reporting to her when the coffee is used up. If so, you might respond with, "Interesting idea. I'm curious, what are the responsibilities of your job?" You might be surprised about the answer to this one. Keep listening. You'll continue this series of questions and brainstorming until you reach the mutual decision that Dusty will have some proactive measures to track supplies. And you have your mornings to get things done!



In a performance coaching situation, as these two examples personify, you have already identified the outcome before you started on the discussion. You have a specific result you wish to achieve, and you want to create open ended questions which will help the employee co-create the solution. An important and valuable commodity in the coaching world is "so that". If you read the question above again, you'll notice that a very powerful shift happens when my question changes to SO THAT everyone has what they need. When you add the 'so that' to your question you are providing the reason for the answer. You are offering the profound and obvious piece of the discussion, which is often times not even in sight of the person you are working with. Give the 'so that' a try for yourself too – you might be surprised how much more you stretch your own skills when you find the end result.

Coaching applies in many other situations. Like the staff or associate meeting when the staff has lots of complaints and no solutions. Or the associates are rumbling about morale, with no positive comments. Put your "what" cap on, and toss out an open ended question that strikes you curious. Add in a "so that" to your morale or your complaint, and quietly listen to the conversation that ensues. I bet you'll be pleasantly surprised at the outcome.

I'm working with all kinds of clients, watching all kinds of success appear in lives of those who are willing to open themselves up to the process. I work with groups, teams, and individuals using the coaching tools to develop workplace harmony, achieve higher performance, and create the next step in career progression. Asking open-ended questions and listening intently will give you amazing new insights, and a fun new way to work with people.

Let me know how it works for you!

Judy Hissong, CLM, is the Principal of Nesso Strategies. She facilitates offsite retreats for strategic planning, develops and implements policies and procedures for growing firms, and assists in development of personnel through programs including teambuilding and communication training. She is an Accredited Executive Coach working with Managing Partners and Administrators to maximize their potential. Contact her for more information on how she can best partner with you and/or your firm. Judy@nessostrategies.com or 206.329.8034.

ALA News

ALA
Association of Legal Administrators
2010 Law Firm Profitability Enhancement Webinar
Wednesday, August 18, 2010
Noon (ET) • 11:00 a.m. (CT) • 10:00 a.m. (MT) • 9:00 a.m. (PT) (3.5 hours)
It's more important than ever to control costs, target your firm's financial strengths and increase profitability. Join the ALA Law Firm Profitability Enhancement Webinar and get the tools to maximize your firm's bottom line.
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