

## Maintaining Morale at High Functioning Law Firms: The Five C's

By [LawVision](#) on July 16, 2013

I celebrate my wedding anniversary this month, and recently recalled words of wisdom passed along by my pastor on our wedding day. In particular, he stressed the importance of five C's required for a healthy marriage:

Communication

Commitment

Courtship

Compliment

Compromise

After a recent project consulting with a law firm facing communication and morale challenges, I realized that while vital to marriage, the five C's are equally applicable to high-functioning law firms as well. Let's take a look:

**Communication:** Peter Drucker once said, "The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said." Although lawyers are well versed in handling conflict on behalf of their clients, interpersonal conflict within a law firm can often go unaddressed. Healthy communication within a law firm requires keeping the lines of communication open and constructive, even when it's uncomfortable.

**Commitment:** Partnership is synonymous with commitment. In sickness and health, partners must rally together for the greater good of the firm. When profits per partner are rising, it's easier to be partners. When tough decisions must be made about partnership standards, capacity management **and changes in the business model, the commitment becomes strained** and tested.

**Courtship:** In marriage, courtship means creating fun and exciting memories even after the big wedding day. Within a law firm, courtship means continuing to hold events that unite the firm. Many law firms discontinued or scaled back firm events during the economic downturn. However, courtship doesn't need to be expensive. During client interviews I've increasingly heard lawyers say they miss having lunches with firm leadership, holiday parties at Partners' houses and firm picnics. Don't let economics stand in the way of courtship and the feeling of inclusiveness it can promote within your firm.

**Compliment:** Lawyers like affirmation. Perhaps we're guilty of having sensitive ego's, but small words of praise go a long way. Don't forget to pass along your appreciation for a well-written brief, well-argued motion or for simply putting in extra hours to meet a last minute deadline. Although giving 110% percent may be part of the job description, recognizing that effort can yield enormous returns.

**Compromise:** Just as compromise is difficult yet essential in a marriage, it can also be challenging within a law firm. A veteran leader has mastered the art of compromise, whereas a novice leader can be more like a bull in a china shop. By gathering diverse perspectives and actively seeking out contradictory points of view, law firm leaders can bolster firm

morale while building a better understanding of their own perspectives. The key is to understand and respect differing points of view, even when you don't see eye to eye.

As with a healthy marriage, there is no secret formula to creating a high-functioning law firm. The five C's give us a foundation to guide our efforts and provide a framework for many law firm and wedding anniversaries for years to come.