

Practice Group Leader Roles – More than a Side Gig

By [Susan Raridon Lambreth](#) on May 14, 2024

Are you a Practice Group or Department Leader in your firm? Or, an industry or client team leader? As I wrote about in the second edition of [The Practice Group Leader's Handbook for Success](#)^[1], you may focus on the magnitude of the responsibilities of a practice leader. Running what is essentially a business unit of your law firm is a big job – yet it is only a part-time role for most practice leaders who consider their main job to be the practice of law. You and your firm's other practice leaders are critical to the engagement of the professionals in your firm, your firm's profitability, and even the future of your law firm. While the job can often be overwhelming – and it requires putting your practice group ahead of your practice at times – you have the potential to have a tremendous positive impact on your firm. We hope you find this job exciting, challenging, and inspiring, as in our experience, most practice leaders in law firms do.

By doing your job well, you should see the following benefits to your practice group:

- **You will help the firm achieve its strategy** – Implementing a strategic plan requires significant involvement of the practice groups. Most truly strategic plans (and even just “improvement plans”) of major firms can't get implemented by just those in firm management and the firm's terrific business professionals. It requires efforts of the practice groups individually and collaboratively across groups.
- **You will have a cohesive group and firm, not a balkanized one** – All organizations naturally balkanize as they grow beyond a certain size. One of the key ways to prevent this is to deploy smaller business units, e., in law firms, often called practice groups, where the members can have a strong sense of cohesion and commitment to the group and one other. The practice group should be the members' homeroom. Decades of research on the field called group dynamics shows that it is more likely that you will have strong allegiance, engagement and accountability within a smaller group than within the firm as a whole.
- **You will have more effective business development and fewer conflicts** – The practice group should work as a team to position the group in the marketplace. With the ability to identify and land new business and cross-sell as the opportunity arises, business development success can be remarkable. In addition, through your annual business planning, you can identify the types of clients and projects you will target. Monitoring and coordinating this at the firm and practice group level can also prevent many conflict situations, particularly strategic or positional ones.
- **You can reduce lawyer attrition and enhance morale** – As you and your group understand the latest science on employee engagement and implement a more managed process for talent development, workload management, and business planning, you typically find that the lawyers and other professionals in the group are more motivated, more challenged with good work and exciting projects and overall, more committed to the group. Typically, they will have a greater sense of meaning and purpose when they feel an important part of the larger group they contribute to.
- **You can minimize risk management issues** – By monitoring intake, workloads and projects, implementing better training and supervision of the group's lawyers, and planning to minimize conflicts, you can reduce the likelihood of risk management issues for your group.
- **You can protect and expand client relationships** – Part of practice group work is developing an annual business plan. The business plan considers the group's most important clients and their future needs. The planning process helps

the group identify where there are vulnerable client relationships and strengthens the ties to clients as they see the firm is anticipating their future legal needs.

- **You can help ensure the future of the practice group** – Through annual planning, you look ahead to the trends affecting your practice and its clients. Moreover, you anticipate gaps in expertise or seniority that will occur in the future and discuss the changing client needs and perceptions of certain practice. The planning process helps the group define its purpose and values. With this information in hand, you can shake the complacency that often exists among lawyers and generate plans to deal with future changes; and
- **You can develop future leaders of your practice and the firm** – In the recent past, it was not uncommon for a firm to have a managing partner for many years with no obvious successor for them. Today, the firm's future leaders come primarily from the ranks of practice leaders with years of experience managing a business unit, often a large department or practice group within the firm. As a result, they are a known commodity and have trust and credibility with their colleagues as experienced leaders and managers.

So, for these reasons and others, we hope that you are excited about this job and the tremendous impact you can have on your practice and your firm.

Every aspect of the practice leader job description is essential. Still, each practice group and its members have different priorities, skills, and interests. Part of your role as a practice leader is to help your group identify its priorities, develop a business plan, and motivate your group members to take on the various roles and activities necessary for the group's success. Thus, view the job description as it applies to the entire group. You are accountable for it, but it should be implemented with participation by all the group members – not just you. Hopefully, undertaking this role will be more exciting and less overwhelming with that mindset. For more information how to do your job as a Practice Group Leader or be successful in the role, consider reading my latest book (the table of contents and information to order is [here](#)). And, I welcome your comments and suggestions if you do and any success story examples you would like to share with our audience.

[1] *First edition published by Thomson Reuters in 2005. Second edition – new and improved in 2023.*

[Susan Raridon Lambreth](#), a founding Principal at LawVision, is nationally recognized as one of the top leadership, practice group, and project management consultants for law firms. She can be reached at (615) 545-5530 | slambreth@lawvision.com.