

Strategic Parlance

By [Michael D. Short](#) on November 12, 2013

There is a lot of strategic planning going on right now...and there damn well should be. The business of law has changed dramatically in a short period of time AND many strategies remain outdated.

As planning processes move forward and each plan builds upon the last, the choices made in the next generation of plans will be (or at least, *should* be) more precise and narrow in scope with respect to the area(s) of strategic focus. As plans evolve, they tend to feature more specific practices, client types, teams, industries, or some segment of the marketplace for tailored investment and growth in revenue and profits.

A key challenge to any planning group is the fact that the words “precise” and “narrow” will be translated by Partners who do not have skills or experiences commensurate with the area(s) of strategic focus as “limiting” and “threatening”. In many instances (but not all) this is not the intention so it is important to reduce the angst and increase the confidence of the Partners in the developing plan.

There is a subtle but vitally important strategic “parlance” that anxious Partners must hear regularly. This needs to be delivered in conjunction with a developing strategic direction that does not explicitly include everyone in the chosen areas of investment/emphasis for future growth and development.

The content of the messaging usually includes some variation of the following thoughts –

As strategists, we are charged with making decisions and choices for the long term good of the firm as a whole. We are going to highlight some practices/industries/client-types/skills/unique capabilities for which we want to be known, in which we want to invest time and money, and from which we think we can expect a fair return for the value of our services.

If we highlight everything we do, then – yes – everyone will feel good about the exercise. However, we will have accomplished very little. Developing a strategy requires tough choices and focused investments. To do our jobs properly, we cannot be burdened with the goal of making everyone feel *directly* involved. We are interested in doing what is best for the firm. If we do anything less than this, we’re not doing our jobs properly.

When you, our valued Partners, see our chosen areas of investment for the first time, typical lawyer insecurities will kick in for those who do not see yourselves explicitly featured in our words. Some of you are going to feel like you are not included/emphasized/valued/loved. We understand why you might feel this way but please try to see the big picture and your role therein.

Within the big picture that we planned, we foresee:

- Expanding the opportunities for all lawyers...not limiting;
- A dynamic planning process, where the chosen areas of investment are reviewed regularly and changes are made whenever necessary;
- An opportunity for every lawyer in the firm to personally align with at least one of our chosen areas of focus; and
- The maintenance and support of other existing groups that make sense, but not at the firmwide level of extra focus and investment.

In fact, during our planning process we created budgets and plans that absolutely include you and your practices. We expect you to invest some time in aligning what you do with our overall firmwide direction and support our group effort. The fact that your area of specialized experience is not explicitly stated in our plan does not mean that you do not have a role in the plan or the firm.

As a planning group, you must repeat some variation of this message again...and again...and again. Still, some won't hear it and will feel completely left out. Be ready for that and push this message even more because any good plan needs buy-in and active support – not passive acceptance.

Of course, only say these things if they are, in fact, true.