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MANAGING PARTNER SPECIAL ISSUE

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You are about to have the most interesting, frustrating, energizing, challenging, rewarding and creative period of your career. So let's get you launched with a short list of savvy first steps—from taking stock and getting help to developing your plan and leading with grace.

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Nancy Geenen

Charged with managing two of Foley & Lardner's 22 offices, Nancy Geenen hits a careful balance in splitting her time between her leadership activities and ongoing practice.

Appointed by the CEO of the 1,000-plus lawyer firm, she has run Foley & Lardner's San Francisco office since 2003 and its Silicon Valley office since 2004. Previously, she was Team Leader and Senior Legal Officer for the United Nations Compensation Commission in Geneva.

What's your management style?

Strategic, creative and involved. I meet regularly with my leadership team but without getting in the way of the work. I make rounds each day I'm in an office, stopping to talk with one or two individuals from each constituency. I ask about work, recent events and personal experiences.

What's your management philosophy?

It consists of five parts. If we have (1) challenging work (2) from clients, both internal and external, who value our contributions (3) while working in a healthy environment (4) with the highest legal and business ethics, (5) profits will be plentiful.

What skill or attribute have you found most critical to being an effective managing partner?

Active listening. Early in my leadership career, I was too quick to act. I wanted to resolve problems in the office effectively and efficiently, rather than spend time strategizing with the speaker on ways to reach resolution without my involvement. Today, after almost five years in leadership, I spend more time asking open-ended questions and listening without simultaneously working on a response. The speaker needs to be seen and heard, but also assisted to achieve a resolution that's of her own making for effective execution.

What's the first thing a new managing partner should do?

Make a list of the many "first" things that you might do and then prioritize the list based on the unique challenges facing the firm or office. Most importantly, sit with your leadership team and listen to the recommendations on how best to address the challenges. Patterns and themes will emerge that will enable the new manag-

ing partner to develop priorities and examine the viability of the current strategic plan. When I was first appointed, I spent two days with our firm's Western Region leadership team and let them teach me, in both group and one-on-one meetings, about the scope and challenges of the MP position.

What's the biggest challenge facing law firms in the next 10 years?

Maintaining quality client service as firms consolidate. Integration and assimilation of lateral partners takes time and patience. Although changing firms is becoming more commonplace, the successful firm will grow through careful and selective lateral acquisition. Strategic hiring is more important than hiring for additional revenues. The key is remembering that clients hire lawyers who add value and think strategically about the client's business.

What's the most important advice you have for a new managing partner?

Everything counts. One example is how you handle communications: Think three times before hitting the Send button to reply to an e-mail, because frequently making a phone call or personal visit is more effective.

What's the best thing about being managing partner?

Teaching, training and encouraging new lawyers and administrative professionals to think like business owners.



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