

## GRANGER AND GERTRUDE ATTEND A LEADERSHIP SEMINAR

Rapidly approaching the first anniversary of their practice as lawyers, Granger and Gertrude have just attended a presentation at their firm that focused on leadership and teamwork. Attendance at the program was mandatory for them and the other associates at their firm.

“So what do you think about the presentation today, Granger?” asked Gertrude as they were returning to their offices.

“I found it interesting and in some respects thought provoking. Some of the points the speaker made were fairly obvious, but others gave me a new perspective on teamwork and leadership,” responded Granger. He added, “I found his comments about the obligations we each have to help one another build our respective practices of particular interest.”

Their firm had retained a consultant to address various issues of professional interest, including the subjects of teamwork and leadership, with the firm’s associates. The speaker commented that effective leaders share three characteristics, which are the foundational cornerstones of effective leadership. And those traits are:

1. A very solid work ethic;
2. A strong moral compass; and
3. A willingness to put the interests of others with whom they work before their own.

The speaker observed that individuals with these traits naturally gravitate into positions of leadership wherever they work—whether in the private or public sector, large or small corporations, law firms or machine shops. People with these traits become our role models. They are people we respect and whose lifestyles we emulate.

The speaker commented that each of the associates he was addressing have an equal opportunity to become respected leaders in their firm. They have a strong work ethic. After all, they would not have been hired by the firm had they not worked hard and excelled in law school. No doubt they would each continue with those work habits. And each should be believed to be guided by a strong moral compass. Indeed, conducting one’s practice with honesty, integrity, and forthrightness was expected of every lawyer at Granger and Gertrude’s firm.

But Granger commented that the third cornerstone of effective leadership—that is the willingness to put the interests of others with whom one works above one’s own interests—is a tougher nut to crack. Being a new associate at a large firm is a very competitive proposition. Each associate knows that seven or eight years in the future he will be competing with his peers for partnership positions in the firm. Granger wondered why he should be motivated to help any other associate build his or her practice when that would tend to stiffen his competition for partnership in later years. Granger had in fact questioned the speaker about this issue, and he had a good answer.

“So Granger—why should you help the associate in the office next to you? Why help him advance his career?” he asked. The answer, he said, was simple. If every lawyer was focused solely on developing and improving his own career, and, indeed, pursued every effort to ensure that he was “getting ahead” of his colleagues, think of what that would mean. It would mean that only one person in the firm was trying to help the lawyer build his practice—and that would be the lawyer himself. But imagine the situation where every lawyer in a firm committed to help every other lawyer build their practices. Instead of just one lawyer seeking to develop his career, that lawyer would—in the case of a large firm like Granger and Gertrude’s—have 400 to 500 lawyers striving to help develop the lawyer’s practice. It is a case of the benefits of the collective “we” far outweighing the negative effects of a firm comprised of lawyers with solo practices who function in a sense as islands remote to the interests of others in their firm. And so the speaker encouraged the associates to strike the words “I” and “me” from their vocabulary, and to think in terms of the collective “we” in connection with their work at the firm.

The speaker shared additional thoughts with the associates about a leader’s willingness to elevate the interests of others above his own. He summed up a leader’s role in five short words: “Take care of your people.” Simple as that. And when you do that—when you care for them and put their interests above your own—people will notice that and you will become a leader.

The speaker offered advice on the subject of “caring for your people.” For starters, he focused on a leader’s need to care for employees of his organization—simple pointers on how to make staff personnel feel welcomed and appreciated. Remember, he advised, that a large law firm’s backbone is its staff. And a firm is only as strong as its staff personnel. Besides compensation, how do you make staff personnel feel appreciated? Simple. By taking the time to get to know them and caring about their well-being. Learn their names and the names of their children. Learn what their interests are. When you see them in the hall, greet them by name. Take time to ask how they are doing. These are simple, small, random acts of kindness—each of which redounds to ensure that staff personnel feel appreciated and valued and work to strengthen camaraderie and team spirit within a firm. There are so many ways to take time to show you sincerely care about someone. Sending personal notes. Not e-mails, which take 15 seconds. But, handwritten letters. “I heard you lost your Dad. I just wanted to let you know I am thinking of you and your family.” When are people most in need of support? When they are facing adversity. Oftentimes it is human nature to want to avoid talking with people when they are facing adversity. Why? Because it is uncomfortable. A person loses a child or receives a cancer diagnosis. You see them coming down the hall and duck into an office so you will not have to talk to them, principally because you do not know what to say and feel uncomfortable. That is not wrong. It is human nature, but it is not what leaders do. Leaders search out those facing adversity and offer their support. Again—small random acts of kindness that show you care.

Granger and Gertrude found interesting the speaker’s comments about the necessity to THINK before speaking in professional settings—and elsewhere. Leaders THINK before they speak. Is what you are about to say T (thoughtful), H (honest), I (intelligent), N (necessary), and K (kind)? If not, do not say it. Harsh, demeaning, and derogatory comments are most often unnecessary, unwise, and counter-productive.

Granger and Gertrude agreed the presentation was meaningful and worth the time they spent in attending the program. They felt confident that by abiding the speaker’s advice to maintain (1) a solid work ethic; (2) a strong moral compass; and (3) a sincere commitment to place the interests of others above their own they would both ultimately become leaders in their firm.