

Best Practices in Leading Client Teams: Build it. Monitor it. Measure it. Report it.

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Every successful endeavor is the result of some measurable degree of cooperation, collaboration and leadership. Whether it is the accomplishments of a team in sports, business, politics, education or community effort, it works better when there is a designated leader who is in charge of making sure all the elements of successful teaming occur. In my role as the coach for over 58 client teams at Akin Gump, success comes when our team leaders focus on four major categories:

Build it

First and foremost, any client initiative must be built with the client in mind. From there, we encourage collaborative thinking from key members of the client team to devise a strategic approach for maximizing our relationship with the client. The collaborative model is crucial because it generates more ideas and develops the requisite initial buy-in needed to launch the team. Our leaders also share information, responsibility and ownership of the initiative among the team members in order to keep momentum alive over time.

Monitor it

Accountability is the most challenging step in any team-based initiative. While we may hope things get done because our lawyers agree to do them, many initiatives fall a distant second to client billable hours. A solid tracking and accountability process can overcome this natural tendency. At our firm, team leaders are responsible for tracking group member's progress as it relates to the plan.

Measure it

What gets measured gets managed, and what gets managed gets done. It is important, up front, to devise specific metrics that will indicate progress toward your goals, as well as eventual success. Some examples of progress metrics might include introductions of our partners to key members of the client's team, on site visits, and/or client presentations. Progress goals are also important to maintain internal morale. It is hard to keep people motivated and acting on an outcome that might take years to accomplish, whereas they can get excited by reaching, and celebrating, shorter term milestones.

Report it

All leaders should be held accountable. There should be an expectation that results will be reported and that the outcomes will be reviewed and widely communicated. In our firm, we have a Team Leader Accountability Report so that leaders know what is expected of them. We ask for quarterly reports, and time them so that the Executive Committee will be able to adequately review them. Looping the Executive Committee into the process is a key final piece because it communicates the importance of the initiative to the team leaders and group members.