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For What You're Worth

As we wind down 2018 and careen into 2019, I would like to pause and reflect on the state of our oftentimes invisible profession. I am not going to delve into how the public does not know that we exist as a profession, nor am I going to try to convince you that our relevance is changing as firms transition into a stronger business/corporate model (because many firms are not getting on board with that necessity).

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For 2019, for the benefit of my health and well-being, I plan on being LOUD. Not just for myself, but for all of us, and I hope that you will join me.”

I am thinking about how we are often the invisibles — the people working in the background who no one pays much attention to until you are not there any longer and everything falls apart. Over these past eight months as ALA President, I have heard disheartening anecdotes: firm administrators having to justify the value of their positions to their firms; chief operating officers being let go without explanation or ever receiving a review after many years of service; low salaries and zero raises; and many, many job consolidations because partners do not want to pay the overhead of professional staff — no matter your relevance or position, but simply because you are not generating revenue as a timekeeper. It makes my heart hurt and my head spin. And it irks the heck out of me.

This month's issue includes two feature articles, one on health and wellness and the other on making employee reviews relevant, that got me thinking. How much of our health and wellness as legal management professionals is based on feeling appreciated and valued in our places of employment? And how many of us receive feedback and consistent employee reviews?

The demographics of our Association show that many of us — more than 50 percent — are employed by law firms with 29 attorneys or fewer. Having worked at several firms within that size range, I am going to make an educated guess that many of us have never received a formal performance review, and if we have, it is not on a consistent basis. Smaller firms often lack the structure and procedures that require such formality. Now, think about how many monthly, quarterly or annual performance reviews you give to those you supervise, or how

many times you have served as a coach or mentor to those same individuals. How many times has that been done for you inside your workplace?

We know that consistent and plentiful feedback and reviews improve performance and morale, which is why we do it for others and for the benefit of the firm. I know many of us are pulled and stretched in many directions. We are the plate spinners — but do we know if we are spinning the right plates at the correct height and the proper speed? Without feedback, it is difficult to know if our priorities align with those of our partners or if a project's outcome is viewed as successful.

Many of us are doing more with less and most of us are more stressed than ever. Wouldn't it be nice if you knew how you were doing? I encourage you to use the power of this Association and your peer connections to leverage the most out of the knowledge you gain from others. Share it with your partners, tell them why it is important to the business and make sure that you all agree on what your priorities are as a legal management professional. Ask for that review and feedback. You deserve the same consideration of your well-being and morale as everyone else in your office.

For 2019, for the benefit of my health and well-being, I plan on being LOUD. Not just for myself, but for all of us, and I hope that you will join me. I am going to ask a lot of questions to get that feedback.

On a final note, I was recently reminded of who does appreciate what we do — our business partners. They see behind the curtain and they understand what we do. Not only am I going to be loud, but I also will focus more on collaborating with them.

As members of this great Association, let's continue to share our successes and remind one another why our roles are relevant. In doing so, we will gain more forward momentum and reiterate why ALA is so important to all of us. Here's to 2019! I look forward to tearing it up with you! ■



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