

MAKING LEADERSHIP WORK FOR YOU

By Ayesha K. Hamilton

To lead people, walk beside them.

—Lao Tzu

The above principle of leadership must guide our involvement in any organization, whether paid or volunteer. Servant leaders put the needs of the whole before their own, focusing on empowering and uplifting those around them, enhancing the team for the benefit of the whole.

Whether we practice as solos or in large firms, our objectives are the same: to earn a living while engaged in this profession. We must engage in community or networking groups to bring business to our firms. To be truly effective, our service must be guided by the principles of servant leadership. Once in the organization, a servant leader doesn't ask "what's in it for me?" but the benefits to the leader are undisputable, allowing the leader to thrive as the organization thrives. Leadership must work in harmony with the leader's personal and business goals.

In these interesting times, some of us find ourselves with extra time on our hands. Use this time to focus on your business development objectives and get involved. As is true with all networking, you get what you invest.

As you think about how to get more involved, ask yourself:

Where do I want to get involved? You must critically analyze where you think your time is best spent to get to the network that will best support your practice area. Talk to colleagues and friends about their networking efforts, how open and welcoming their groups are to new members, who the target audience is, and where the meetings take place. Attending different meetings is a great way to start figuring out if the organization is a good fit for you.

Am I ready to invest the time it takes? Some make the mistake of joining a lot of groups to expand their networking reach but lose focus by being spread too thin. Once you join, devote the time to attend meetings and become a familiar face, learn the culture, ask questions, and take on tasks. Being present and engaged in one organization is much more effective than being on the membership rolls of five where no one knows who you are. This is also where servant leadership begins as you commit time and resources to the organization as a whole.

Where do I feel most committed to volunteer service?

There is no wrong answer to this question. Make sure you are involved with a mission that you are passionate about, whether it be related to children, education, women's rights, your profession, chambers of commerce, etc. It all counts. What matters most is your level of engagement and, hence, your personal impact.

How do I get started? A great first step is to look at the profiles of colleagues and competitors to identify organizations you may be interested in. Look at the membership list, meeting topics, locations, etc., to make sure they're a good fit. Then reach out to these individuals to talk about their experience in that organization and ask to attend as a guest. Think about people you know who are true servant leaders and connect with them; they will likely always support and encourage your involvement and growth in the organization.

Servant leadership is the most important part of your business development plan. Be strategic and thoughtful to find the right fit so that you are perfectly poised for the greatest impact. ■



Ayesha K. Hamilton (ahamilton@ahlawpc.com), Esq., is a business and employment attorney and the principal of the Hamilton Law Firm, LLC, in Princeton, New Jersey. She serves on the Board of Trustees for the New Jersey State Bar Association and the Mercer County Bar Association, the State Bar's Diversity Committee, and is the past chair of NJSBA Solo/Small Firm Section.