Value Practice Profile: Law Firm Value Task Force at Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP

Interview with Kristin Sudholz, Director of Practice Development
Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP

June 2009

Last fall, Drinker Biddle & Reath created a 'Value Task Force' to focus on aligning with client objectives and providing value to clients. The firm supports the ACC Value Challenge, and the Law Firm Value Task Force was initially designed to help the firm and its lawyers develop tools to focus on value.

Following is a summary of key attributes of the Law Firm Value Task Force and goals they've set for 2009.

Value Task Force

The Value Task Force consists of 10 members and includes the following key leaders within the firm: Chief Operating Officer, Marketing Partner, Strategic Partner, Finance Partner and Director of Practice Development. In addition, the task force includes a number of junior partners and lateral hires that have diverse geographic and substantive backgrounds, who bring in fresh ideas and are focused on trying new things. The task force 'meets' monthly via phone.

Key Goals for 2009: Education & Tools; Alternative Fee Structures; Better Use of Technology, Ideas for Cost Controls and Matter Management

The task force has set three initial goals for 2009: (1) education and tools on value; (2) defining alternative fee structures; and (3) better use of technology.

- **Education & Tools- 'Road show':** The firm's Director of Practice Development conducted a 'road show' to visit each of the firm's major offices during Spring, 2009.

  >>*Road show visits coincide with monthly partner meetings-* allows Director of Practice Development to meet with partners and counsel in each of the major offices and personally deliver the value message. Additional presentations include: presentation to associates firm-wide, and presentation to staff.

  >>*Tone at the Top:* Underscoring the importance of the Value Task Force to the firm, road show sessions are opened by the firm's Managing Partner, Executive Partner or the Managing Partner for the relevant office.

  >>*Key Discussion Points:* key goals of the road show include educating/engaging partners in discussion on: (1) the ACC Value Challenge,(2) how in-house counsel define value, (3) how the firm can provide value, and (4) what the task force is doing and planning to assist its lawyers.

  >>*Sample presentation deck:* a sample of the Value Task Force's road show presentation desk may be accessed here.

- **Alternative Billing Structures- HandBook:** The firm has a handbook on alternative billing structures that outlines various forms of alternative fee structures the firm has implemented or might consider.

  >>*Tools, Models and Checklists:* the handbook includes: why alternative structures, best practices in developing alternative fees, approximately a dozen or more descriptions of structures accompanied by real-life examples of how they have been proposed/used for a variety of practices and clients, worksheets to assist with designing a budget, names of partners in the firm (different offices and practices) who can assist with developing a fee structure, and a variety of other resources (articles, etc.).

  >>*Book will help transform current processes:* current process for implementing alternative fee structures requires advance approval of the firm's Chief Financial Partner. The new guidebook will help set models that can be used for implementing alternative fee structures without individual advance approval provided that they are structured consistent with the parameters in the guidebook. Notification to the firm's marketing group of alternative fee arrangements will assist the firm in tracking these arrangements.

  >>*Goal to increase matters handled on an alternative fee basis:* the firm hopes to increase the percentage of matters handled on an alternative fee basis.

- **Technology:** the firm is exploring leveraging extranet tools to give to clients to manage outside counsel relationships. The concept would work well for in-house counsel looking to create greater efficiency by having all firm extranets in one place (versus 25 different firm extranets) as a type of matter management function. Access to various parts of the extranets would be password-protected. While templates for extranets could be structured are available, customization is also available.
- **Additional Goals**: The task force is investigating other ways to reign in costs, including discussions with practice groups, client teams, and individual lawyers to develop customized solutions. In addition, they are posting a special page on the portal complete with links to: a webinar version of the ACC Value Challenge Presentation, the ACC Value Challenge website; a PDF of the ACC Value Challenge Briefing package; links to videos of a series of presentations by in-house counsel on "value" and more.
- **Results to Date**: Drinker Biddle's Director of Practice Development describes the road show as extremely successful and embraced at almost every level of the firm. Lawyers are raising the ACC Value Challenge with their clients, and frequently send the ACC Value Challenge Briefing Package to clients that are unfamiliar with it. In addition, the firm has altered its Fall Associate Program, and describes the modified program as an effort to help achieve alignment with the value clients seek in junior associates.

Key Success Factors for Creating a Value Task Force

Following are some key success factors for creating and implementing a Value Task Force:

- *Pick people that are passionate about value:* in selecting members, go beyond those who might be the 'usual picks' and invite members who are forward thinking and interested in being engaged.
- *Select early objectives that allow you to demonstrate 'small wins':* helps to gain initial credibility within the firm; easier to make broader changes when early successes are shown.
- *Show stronger, better relationships:* demonstrate how value translates to stronger, better relationships.
- *Show profitability- 'yes we can':* idea is that the firm can change traditional ways of doing things to be more client focused and still be profitable.

Contact Information:

Kristin Sudholz (Kristin.Sudholz@dbr.com)