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On Nevada Firm's 75th Anniversary, Managing Partner Offers Leadership Insights

Anniversaries often generate reflections of the past and anticipation for the future. This year marks the 75th anniversary of the nationally renowned Nevada law firm McDonald Carano, and I happily offer this space to George Ogilvie, managing partner since 2019 who is helping lead the firm's anniversary celebration. Ogilvie joined the partnership in 1994 and has served in many leadership roles, while maintaining a robust construction litigation practice. In what follows, he presents in his own words some sage insights on the responsibilities and priorities of a managing partner. (To learn more about Ogilvie's practice and career, see his bio at mcdonaldecarano.com.)

– Steven T. Taylor

Honor Your Firm's History

The firm managing partner is a custodian of the firm's past and a steward of its future. These are separate yet intertwined responsibilities. Understanding the firm's culture is critical to determining future opportunities and limitations. This requires an historical review, but some vision and a determination to make hard choices if the firm culture does not fit potential opportunities. Understanding the firm's past also reveals the obstacles to what the firm as an institution will be able to undertake, overcome, and achieve, as well as revealing insights on the most effective way to solve challenges and shepherd change. Studying the firm's historical milestones will also help managing partners establish realistic goals for

themselves as well as set appropriate metrics for the firm's future success. A managing partner's role should be to understand and leverage the past to exploit future opportunities.

I view it as critical in my leadership role to understand the firm's history to become the firm I inherited and with which I am entrusted to carry forward. It is important for managing partners to have the humble perspective that they have been elected to continue moving an institution forward that many others have helped create, build, and sustain. Serving as managing partner is my opportunity to give back to a firm and its people who have given so much to me. A sense of duty, loyalty, and appreciation drive my purpose. McDonald Carano has a proud history, and I want to do my part to continue that history for the next generations.

I've been at McDonald Carano for three decades and it's an honor and a privilege to serve as one of only four managing partners in the firm's history. As we celebrate our 75th anniversary and head into our next 75 years, I honor those who have served as mentors and continue to inspire me today, including Leo Bergin who dedicated extraordinary professional commitment and personal sacrifice in serving as our managing partner for 30 years.

Be an Institutional

A managing partner must be an institutionalist who places the best interests of the

firm above all else. Particularly in times of challenge and change, the greatest assets are impartiality, objectivity, and fairness. Those critical attributes are demonstrated when the managing partner provides the voice of the firm as an institution. My most important responsibility is to serve as the ultimate protector of the firm's legacy and its future.

Respect for this leadership office and trust in the person who holds the position occurs when everyone at the firm is confident that decisions and actions are designed to benefit the firm as a collective organization. They do not favor one person, office, practice, or department, and all stakeholders' interests are valued. Being transparent, building consensus, keeping the partnership united in its purpose, and getting the best from all the firm's people are best achieved when the benefactor of a call-to-action is the law firm itself — the institution everyone relies on for their livelihoods.

Lead More, Manage Less, Clear Obstacles

Contrary to the title, being a managing partner is often more about serving as a leader than a manager. While the role requires both skill sets, it is imperative to understand the difference and know when to be one instead of the other because different situations require different involvement of the managing partner. Leaders create a vision, and they inspire and invigorate others to independently and collectively achieve the big-picture goal for the greater good. Leadership is more akin to establishing what ultimately needs to happen, while managing is more hands-on with direct control over the detailed steps to make it happen. When I lead, I set the stage with encouragement, optimism, and support. When I manage, I direct and supervise who should do what, when, and how. It is one or the other, and never both.

Managing partners also have to navigate the reality that the business of law is individualized by nature and in that environment leading is more effective, more needed, and often more welcome than managing. Lawyers make their own decisions about what areas of law they

practice and which firm they join. They select the clients they prefer to serve and determine the best strategy for each client's matter. A lawyer's book of business is individually established after years of developing and maintaining one-on-one relationships with current and potential clients and referral sources.

As a result, managing partners lead a generally independent and sometimes autonomous constituency, and understanding and accepting that fact is critical to a leader's success. A sense of independence among the firm partners does not make the job impossible; it's only one of many factors a managing partner must consider when engaging in a constructive manner. Energy, drive, and confidence are valuable characteristics of independent people. Effective leaders need to figure out how to harness those characteristics on behalf of the firm.

At McDonald Carano, my goal is to motivate toward the big picture and make sure everyone keeps the same big picture in mind. To maintain individual engagement and collective momentum, I focus on the most important daily contribution of a managing partner — create efficiencies and clear obstacles so attorneys can concentrate on client service and excel at the aspects of their profession about which they are passionate.

Evolve in Synch with Change

McDonald Carano is the only full-service statewide law firm remaining from the pioneers that established our state's legal community. While other prominent Nevada firms closed their doors or merged with national and regional firms, McDonald Carano proudly stayed its course of growth and expansion and continues to thrive as an independent Nevada law firm. We regularly reject ongoing overtures to join other firms, and every overture is a moment of truth to check ourselves because independence on its own is not a business strategy. Our success tracks a path of strategic evolution that reflects changes in our state's legal, business, government, and civic communities.

Managing partners must stay abreast of emerging indicators of change so they can lead their firm's evolution in synch with change. During our first 75 years, Nevada's population increased from 160,000 to nearly 3 million, Reno shed its moniker as the Biggest Little City in the World, and Las Vegas grew from the wedding and divorce capital of the world to the gaming and entertainment capital of the world. The state's business landscape changed, so did the state's legal profession, and so did McDonald Carano. We evolved the breadth and sophistication of our practice areas to handle gaming regulatory regimes that had become models around the world, mergers and acquisitions of multi-billion dollar publicly traded corporations, sophisticated estate planning for ultra-high-net-worth individuals, massive commercial real estate development and construction, and complex commercial litigation.

Looking toward the firm's next 75 years, the signs of change that will direct our ongoing evolution are already here. Nevada's population is forecast to increase another one million to over four million by 2040; the expansion of professional sports is rapidly

creating a new multi-billion dollar economic sector; the Tahoe Reno Industrial Center is the largest industrial park in the U.S. and third largest in the world; and Nevada is the epicenter of a domestic lithium supply chain. In gaming, 2023 was the third year Nevada gaming revenue was higher than the previous 12 months, Nevada sportsbooks collected a record \$481.3 million in gaming revenue, and the \$3.7 billion Fontainebleau resort opened on the strip within nine days of Red Rock Resorts opening its local property Durango in southwest Las Vegas. The passenger count at Harry Reid International Airport set a new annual record of 57.6 million in 2023 and the \$2.3 billion Sphere and the Formula One Las Vegas Grand Prix introduced two new transformational entertainment attractions.

In other words, McDonald Carano is in its 75th anniversary year and the imperative to continue evolving is already clear. The mandate for managing partners is to translate signs of change into plans for their firm's successful future. ■

—George Ogilvie

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