

## The Role of Leadership in the Hiring Process

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by Tom Elliott

My commercial litigation practice takes me into boardrooms and federal and state courtrooms throughout the country. I am a founding shareholder of Elliott Greenleaf & Siedzikowski, a full service law firm with over 50 attorneys in offices in Blue Bell, Philadelphia, Scranton and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and in Wilmington, Delaware. I also serve as co-chair of the firm's hiring committee.

My friend and uniquely gifted professional leadership coach John Keyser asked me to express in this limited space my perspective on the role of leadership in our associate hiring process.

The firm has traditionally hired our first year associates through our 8-week summer associate program for second year law students. We also hire former trial and appellate court clerks upon completion of their clerkships.

Whether we review their performances as summer associates or through their clerkships, we look for leaders. So where do we find them and how do we identify them? We look first for outstanding academic performance. Undergraduate and law school grades are strong, but not exclusive indicators of intellectual curiosity.

All of the law students to whom we grant interviews have compiled outstanding undergraduate and law school academic records, but what distinguishes the best from the good? We look most closely at the ones who have what I call the "X-factor." Defining the X-factor is difficult, but it is unmistakable when you see it; and a bit like Potter Stewart's classic definition of obscenity, "I don't know what it is but I know it when I see it." (*Jacobellis v. Ohio*, 378 U.S. 184, 197 (1964)).

Some components and characteristics of my X-factor are:

- **Community service** – we search for women and men who step beyond the all too prevalent chronic self-absorption and genuinely act as men and women for others; we expect our lawyers to give back to their communities through meaningful leadership associations, and look to undergraduate experiences as tutors, charity fundraisers, and volunteers in civic and church functions;
- **Work ethic** – it is as true as it may be trite, but the only place success comes before work is in the dictionary; we expect all of our attorneys to work the hours required to provide our clients the highest quality work product. My brother is our firm's Chair and is fond of saying, "we don't have work horses and show horses, we are all work horses;"
- **Team players** – through athletics, or otherwise, we need leaders who have made meaningful contributions through the team concept, we staff our cases within the team concept and work our litigation and non-litigation matters in teams;
- **Communicators** – whether in the courtroom, deposition room, or the boardroom, our attorneys must be poised, confident and effective oral and written communicators. A failure to make convincing eye contact or the inability to conduct or expand an interview is as unproductive as split infinitives, sentence fragments or incoherent paragraphs;
- **Sense of humor** – all our attorneys will be exposed to long hours, and early in their careers much of it is focused on intensive research and writing; without a sense of humor those hours can become quite a grind, and a capacity to laugh appropriately, and occasionally with self-deprecation, will make it a much more tolerable situation for everyone;
- **Self-starter** – motivation must come from within and it is an attitude sourced from genetic programming and learned behavior. We highly value the ability to work independently, thoroughly and quickly while remaining focused on our firm's reputation for positive, professional results; we require the constant motivation to look at one more case and/or try one more analytical approach, combined with the confidence to know when you have completed your assignment. When a young associate asks me how long a brief should be I repeat President Lincoln's response to a question asking him how long should a man's legs be – he replied, "long enough to reach the ground." Rely on your judgment and experience to determine when you are finished and stop.

Among highly talented individuals it is difficult to make our hiring decisions based on resumes and interviews, and while the evaluative aspects of my "X-factor" provide some structure, this search for future leaders of our firm is much more art than science.

If you would like to contact Tom Elliott, please feel free to email him at [tje@elliottgreenleaf.com](mailto:tje@elliottgreenleaf.com).

## TOM ELLIOTT

*Tom Elliott is an attorney in Philadelphia with the firm of Elliott, Greenleaf and Siedzikowski. His expertise and experience are extensive, including employment practices, trade secrets, intellectual property, toxic tort, product liability, environmental matters, international banking and financial matters, as well as sports franchises, here in the U.S. as well as in Europe. He is a highly regarded litigator.*

*Very much of a doer, which I greatly admire, Tom is currently, or has been previously, active in leadership roles with the Pennsylvania Bar, the Philadelphia Bar, the American Bar Association, the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, and other important organizations in his field.*

*Tom is a graduate of Georgetown, the College and Law School. He played baseball at Georgetown and remains involved with the program. His son was a star shortstop for the Hoyas and his daughter is also a terrific athlete and will likely play college softball.*

*I have great admiration for Tom's leadership; he truly gets things done! And with all he does, he is a devoted family member and manages to stay close to his old and his good friends all over the country.*

*This is a man of values!*

*Posted on November 25, 2010 in [Leadership](#)*