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# WITNESS

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# The Maestro Behind the Scenes

Law firm management has been one of the most challenging roles in the Indian legal fraternity. While there's a never ending list of portfolios that a leading law firm today in India would be handling, the tougher part is managing the show behind the scenes. Lex Witness this month gets into a heart to heart conversation with one of the many leading ladies in this domain - Poonam Rawat, Chief Operating Officer, Dhir & Dhir Associates.

## **Briefly share your work responsibilities at Dhir & Dhir Associates**

That's a tough one. Well, as the Chief Operating Officer of the firm, I practically live the firm and my involvement pervades across all the major functions of the firm. I am responsible for all aspects of management, corporate communication, budgeting, IT, HR, knowledge management, practice development, MIS and administrative functions in the firm.

## **What are the most critical functions when it comes to law firm management?**

The most critical function when it comes to management of a law firm, is to work with the Managing Partners of the firm to realise their vision and work out the strategies to achieve the objectives they have established for the firm by providing leadership to the entire team of the firm.

Since this is a service industry, which is entirely dependent on its human resources, management of this resource is one of the most critical functions.. It involves building and preserving the work culture of the firm

and create an environment where all the professionals works as a team to provide unmatched client service with the best possible short and long term results.. This not only includes acquisition and retention of talent, but also motivating the professionals to perform to the best of their capacities and dovetail the individual aspirations of the team members with the overall growth of the firm.

Needless to say, knowledge management is one of the inevitable facets that I strive to better on every day. To combat with the dynamics of laws today and henceforth their interpretation, impact assessment etc. requires a very detailed fine eye possession of the latest state of the art tools and references. This increasingly requires use of technology to update the knowledge and create a data bank for quick access, assimilation and delivery of such knowledge within the firm as well as utilize it for the benefit of the clients.

Having talked about the intellectual aspects, one of the most challenging

mandates is that of branding and corporate communication. Right from positioning the firm's thought leadership across various platforms to identifying the in trend branding vehicles is the catch of the moment. This enables the clients for peer comparison and helps them take the decision amongst competitors. Dedicated efforts are undertaken in creating, communicating and executing a robust content marketing strategy, which covers quality, quantum and nature of work being done for improving the firm's ranking in the legal realm.

Amongst others, formulating policies for HR, administration, IT, Performance and Growth, KRAs and other operational aspects are taken care to ensure smooth functioning of the firm.

## **HOW DID YOU ENTER INTO THIS SPECIFIC ROLE IN A LAW FIRM?**

I am a lawyer by profession and have been working with the Managing Partner since 1998 when I joined the firm and have been assisting him in managing the firm. Mr.

## VOICE



**POONAM RAWAT**  
Chief Operating Officer,  
Dhir & Dhir Associates

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**I have been a people's person and it was easy to strike a sense of belongingness with the Partners and their teams. Being a lawyer generated an affinity with my peers and created a comfort level to effectively perform my role.**

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Dhir recognized my inherent skills and talent as a Manager and encouraged and motivated me to explore my potentials beyond the legal practice. I realized that management plays a very important role in the overall growth of the firm by combining individual skills of the professionals to work together as a team to achieve greater heights. I have always been a people's person and it was easy to strike a sense of belongingness amongst Partners and their teams. Being a lawyer generated an affinity with my peers, who did not feel that they were dealing with some outsider, who is an alien to the profession. To hone my skills further, I undertook a specialized training in Leading Professional services from IIM Ahmedabad. Since then, there has been no looking back.

**WHAT DO YOU THINK DIFFERENTIATES THE LEGAL BUSINESS FROM OTHER SERVICE SECTORS?**

In recent times, the dividing line between legal and other services is blurring. The nature of work in corporate advisory, compliance and regulatory advisory etc. is similar to other consultancies. However, legal services in dispute resolution transcends the conventional

definition of consulting and extends support to the clients on human/emotional level. The services are not limited to handling a case, but also offering moral support to the stressed client in a manner that assuages and ameliorates their problem. The foremost duty is to guide them in the right direction and not limit to one's role in generating transactional solutions. Legal Service is a noble profession that even undertakes pro-bono cases for social upliftment and generating awareness.

**WHAT ARE THE SUCCESS MANTRAS TO SUCCESSFUL LAW FIRM MANAGEMENT?**

Professionals work under great pressure. As such empathy for the entire team as well as the client is of prime importance. Legal Knowledge management lays the foundation of success for a law firm. Information is updated, analysed and shared, which in turn saves time, increase efficiency and quality in a cost effective manner. Maintaining an open door policy and accessibility to the professionals as well as clients, problem solving attitude, motivating the teams are other key factors of a 'success driven' firm. [W](#)

**ABOUT THE INTERVIEWEE**

*Poonam Rawat is the Chief Operating Officer of Dhir & Dhir Associates, a full service law firm. She is a lawyer by profession and has undergone an executive program from IIM, Ahmadabad on "Leading Professional Service Firms". With nearly two decades' experience in this sector, she spearheads the firm's operations and focuses on management, HRM, knowledge management, corporate communications, IT, practice development and other verticals. She works closely with lawyers and clients to understand their legal requirements, professional aspirations and create business opportunities.*