

Strengthening Executive Leadership Teams in Trial Courts

By Diane Pawlowicz

Executive Leadership Program Advisory Committee Members

- Judge William D. Missouri
- Judge Diane O. Leasure
- Judge Thomas J. Love
- Pamela Harris
- Kathy Smith
- Suzanne James
- Nancy Mueller
- Robert Prender
- Frank Broccolina
- Faye Gaskin

“Loved the program and really enjoyed meeting the other judges, court administrators and clerks. I feel it is very beneficial to place the three administrative positions in a program together. It was “eye-opening” to realize they have the same frustrations and challenges—we have a great deal in common.”

— A participant

Leadership and teamwork—these two concepts may seem mutually exclusive, but as we know, the Maryland Judiciary’s organizational structure demands that to be effective, our leadership teams must excel at both. About leadership, Stephen Covey says, “Management is efficiency in climbing the ladder of success; leadership determines whether the ladder is leaning against the right wall.” About teamwork, Andrew Carnegie states “Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision; the ability to direct individual accomplishment toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.”

In recognition of this, the Maryland Judiciary recently sponsored an Executive Leadership Program for leadership teams in the trial courts. With the vision and support of Chief Judge Robert M. Bell and the direction of Frank Broccolina, state court administrator, a program was developed that focused on enhancing the shared leadership relationship among the executive leaders in the trial courts, consisting of the administrative judge, clerk of court and court administrator in the Circuit Courts and the administrative judge, administrative clerk and administrative commissioner in the District Court.

The concept for bringing together these teams for a 2½-day program and the curriculum envisioned by the Advisory Committee were innovative enough to capture grant funding from the State Justice Institute. This funding allowed the program to be presented to all jurisdictions over a six-month period, with approximately six courts attending each session.

The Judiciary partnered with the University of Maryland’s James MacGregor Burns Academy of Leadership-School of Public Policy to deliver the program. Nationally renowned faculty from the academy provided presentations on the MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator), and the FIRO-B (Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation-Behavior). They also

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Minnesota Judge Kevin Burke (standing) conducts a leadership program session.

facilitated team exercises to help participants better understand key aspects of personality and behavior and how those characteristics might impact the team in its communication, problem solving, decision making, and interpersonal relations.

These themes were further explored with an overview of negotiations skills and activities that highlighted how personal negotiations are affected by trust and communication. Judge Kevin Burke from Hennepin County, Minn., was the keynote presenter who helped to tie all these concepts into the real work of the court. He shared many ideas he and his court have implemented over the years to increase trust and fairness, and facilitated discussions about roles and responsibilities, court culture, teamwork and communication. Chief Judge Bell personally welcomed the groups to the program and spoke of the importance of effective court administration in achieving trust and confidence in our judicial system.

Planning for a second leadership program is beginning and will be held in January-March 2009. The curriculum will build upon many of the concepts introduced during the first session. [Diane Pawlowicz is executive director of the Court Research and Development Department.](#)

Leadership Team Programs: A Participant's Viewpoint

By Sandra K. Dalton

When Chief Judge Robert M. Bell wrote to invite us to attend a leadership program, he stated, "Leadership is a critical determinant in the effectiveness of trial courts. The sheer scope and complexity of our mission and role in the administration of justice demands the attention and commitment of the combined efforts of a court's top executives working together in partnership." Our invitation gave us a mission statement and a vision of the intended goal. Our first retreat would focus on an interactive curriculum. I believe it is also fair to state that one understood the importance of this event by the nature of the invitation: the leadership team must all be able to attend together, no designees, all meals will be provided on site, no guests.

Getting Ready

Prior to our meeting, everyone took an online Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and another assessment known as the FIRO-B. The first group of attendees from six Circuit Courts met in November 2007, where a new vision of team building was launched.

We met at a private, quiet, secluded place known as the Aspen Wye Institute's Wye Woods Conference Center. To interject some humor (I am after all an ENFP—that's Myers-Briggs-speak—more about that later), with high inclusion and affection scores, and with no disrespect intended, the invitation read a bit like a scene from "Mission Impossible." And because my type indicator is correct in that I like meetings, I was ready to accept this mission.

Day One

Day One for me must have been similar to a juror reporting for their first day of service. I knew it was important to be here, I didn't know what would be expected of me, and I wondered what the other attendees were feeling. After the welcome and overview, our morning started with Minnesota Judge Kevin Burke addressing "Leadership Issues in the Trial Courts." A few of the topics presented and discussed included "Why an Effective Leadership Model is Important,"

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“High Performing Partnerships,” “Court Culture,” “Trust,” “Procedural Fairness,” “Respect,” and “Connecting to Our Community.” We were challenged to address how we can improve our leadership partnership, improve morale and trust, and enhance service to a diverse customer base.

After a group lunch we reconvened for the afternoon session. The presenter walked us through our personal results of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator test. This questionnaire helps to determine one’s personality type, and the test can be used to assess management skills and facilitate teamwork and problem solving. This was a very interactive time as we reviewed our results, and compared with others on our team. We would later get input on how our personality styles affect the way we interact and how others perceive us. As I said earlier, I am an ENFP. This types me as Extroverted, Intuitive, Feeling, and Perceiving. The MBTI helps us to understand how we take in information and how we come to conclusions. Simply realizing that everyone is not like us is an important basis for working together and respecting one another.

Days Two and Three

Days Two and Three were equally educational and interactive. We learned more about the interpersonal

characteristics we bring to a team through the results of our FIRO-B assessments. We also participated in a very interesting activity called “Oil Pricing,” which helped us to learn about negotiation styles and how to achieve a win-win solution. Exercises to define the roles and responsibilities of the administrative judge, clerk of court, and court administrator—and the group input—were informative and thought provoking. As part of our study of the “Abilene Paradox,” we broke into groups by job title; the judges, clerks and administrators then reported back with suggestions of what the other groups could do to enhance our working relationship.

The program debriefing and evaluations confirmed that this was a wonderful experience. With a deeper understanding of our individual responsibilities and combined goals, the intended goals and results will be met and enhanced by all partners. Our combined goal is to make Maryland courts the best courts in the nation. Sandra Dalton is clerk of the Circuit Court for Frederick County.

“I am finally getting around to say ‘thank you’ for the retreat. At first I was very skeptical of this ‘invitation,’ but I must say, I enjoyed it and got a lot of useful information.”

— A participant



courtesy Sandra Dalton

Sandra Dalton (seated, second from right) joins her fellow leadership program participants.