

HIA-LI Highlights a Law Firm with a Heart

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Joe Campolo draws heavily on his early life experiences in steering the course of the law practice in which he is managing partner. Campolo's firm, Campolo, Middleton & McCormick, LLP had its' beginnings in early 2007 shortly after Campolo left his position as CEO of a technology firm, he told an audience at the September 22nd CEO Roundtable at Ronkonkoma's Holiday Inn. It began as an opportunity to work independently and has grown into an established firm faced with the high-class problem of how to manage its growth.

In not quite five years, the practice has gone from just Campolo and one client to an office of 25 with broad exposure in the business community. In 2010, Campolo, Middleton & McCormick, LLP was recognized during the HIA-LI's Business Achievement Awards as Rookie of the Year, and this year was a finalist in the Small Business category.

Characterizing himself as "an average guy from Long Island", Campolo outlines a somewhat crooked path to his current success. As an experienced attorney, veteran of the Marine Corps and former computer salesperson, he has incorporated lessons learned from these varied experiences into grooming and growing his firm.

He describes this path as a number of seminal moments – choices made, opportunities taken and the occasional divergence. The key, Campolo said, is having a vision of what you want and knowing that if you're not happy, you have the power to change your life. Talking about a time when he took a hiatus to do construction, he said "it allowed me to re-ground and, in hindsight, it was a good thing as it allowed me to see better paths".

In discussing his law practice, Campolo asserts that the services he offers are not all that different from other services or products and, therefore, face the same challenges. "Legal services are being commoditized", he says, citing legalzoom.com as an example, "and law firms have to adapt to this market." It is easy to see how consumers shopping

according to price and ease of access can impact traditional service providers. So, how does Campolo, Middleton & McCormick, LLP, differentiate itself?

Campolo, Middleton & McCormick, LLP's tag line is "Big Firm Quality. Small Firm Value". The "value" is dedication to customer service. To Campolo, customer service is not just something you pay lip service to, "Nothing else matters but servicing the client. Nothing." When he worked selling computers on a commission basis, he was attentive to customers and quickly realized that providing excellent service was the key to succeeding.

Taking customers, regardless of appearance or what they intended to purchase, providing follow on assistance and being available for support led to referrals – people seeking Campolo out as the sales rep to do business with. From this he learned that "the ability to connect with customers to make sure they feel they are getting value is what drives business and brings clients back," says Campolo. "I want my clients to feel like they are a priority. It should be implicit that my job is 'Don't worry – I will take care of it'."

The firm also occupies a niche in the legal services arena. "Long Island is a weird legal market," Campolo points out, "with most services being provided by large firms or small, usually sole practitioners." This puts customers in the position of having to choose between the very expensive or a lack of depth or expertise. By bringing the expertise of attorneys with large firm experience, and being budget conscious, Campolo is able to provide large firm service and know-how at a significantly lower price.

Understanding your niche and how to provide true value-added service is only part of the equation in a successful business. Leadership is also a key component and Campolo's learned some lessons there, too. He looks at business like a safari – the whole ecosphere is connected and "everything will come back to you some way, somehow." In order to

be mindful of this, Campolo follows the Marine Corps Principles of Leadership. As a non-commissioned officer (NCO) in the Corps, he learned that being in charge means being responsible for others; their actions, well-being and success.

Campolo summarizes 10 key traits that he strives to employ: Take responsibility for yourself and your team; Know yourself and seek improvement; Develop your subordinates; Ensure assignments are understood, supervise and carry it through to completion; Know your team and look after their welfare; Keep everyone informed; Set goals you can reach; Make sound and timely decisions; Know your job and; Work as a team.

While times may be uncertain and it's not possible to predict or control the future, Campolo is committed to using the leadership guidelines learned in the Marines so he can control his role ensuring that his employees understand their mission, their roles, and the expectation that they are striving for a mutual goal.

During the Q&A, Fred Eisenbud, HIA-LI Board member asked how the firm gets new clients besides word of mouth. Campolo aggressively uses advertising, social media, articles, PR and networking to grow the business. "Organizations like HIA-LI provide the ability to connect and network, not just for me, but also our clients."