

Legal Marketers Embrace 'Vulnerability' To Lead Amid Virus

By **Xiumei Dong**

Law360 (October 22, 2020, 8:47 PM EDT) -- Aside from helping law firms navigate the COVID-19 pandemic, legal marketing professionals have found opportunities in these uncertain times to demonstrate and hone leadership skills, particularly for those who can embrace the power of vulnerability to cultivate a team environment, a group of legal marketers said at a virtual conference Thursday,

Four marketing leaders joined moderator Alycia Sutor, who is managing director at the sales effectiveness firm GrowthPlay, at a virtual panel for the Legal Marketing Association's annual conference. During their discussion, the group shared lessons that helped them climb the career ladder and the "vulnerable style" of leadership they deployed while combating the pandemic.

"When this whole pandemic started, I remember having discussions with my direct reports saying, 'I have no idea what to do.' Because I didn't. Because the way I had been doing my job for 25 years, completely changed," said panelist Aleisha Gravit, chief marketing and business development officer at [Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP](#).

However, Gravit said she soon realized that other managers and senior leaders felt the same when she opened up about her vulnerability, which helped bring the teams closer together while facing the challenges arising from the pandemic.

"Once I just said it and said 'I don't know what to do,' and other people acknowledged that they felt the same way, then I started working with my team and working with others to figure it out, and we did figure it out," Gravit added. "We figured it out together."

Drawing from her own experience, Jeanne Hammerstrom, chief marketing officer of Benesch Friedlander Coplan & Aronoff, also said that being vulnerable has allowed her to gain trust from others, fostering more meaningful relationships.

"If you don't show characteristics of sympathy, empathy, all those kinds of things a vulnerable leader shows, then I think it's hard to lead," she said.

However, in a law firm environment where the legal professionals are working hand-in-hand with the "hard-charging, overly confident, sometimes very Type A" lawyers, showing vulnerability can often be perceived as a sign of weakness, Sutor said. She pointed to the issue of "impostor syndrome," which is the feeling of being inadequate despite proven success.

While impostor syndrome is a common struggle among legal marketers, as well as others in many industries, Lisa Simon, who is the chief marketing and business development officer for Lewis Roca Rothgerber Christie LLP, added that the pandemic put a spotlight on the problem since most people don't know what's going to happen next. Simon worked to pull the team together and share their vulnerabilities.

"Just being able to have that real vulnerable conversation with managing partners, with some of our leadership, helped cement the conversation about what it is that we were trying to do moving forward and tamp down some of that impostor syndrome that we can get baked into our personality,"

Simon said.

Elaborating further on the idea of vulnerability, Simon added that another important leadership trait is to be "vulnerable enough" to ask questions.

"When you see that, you see a genuine interest in learning, which I think is so vital to any leadership skill," she said.

--Editing by Emily Kokoll.