

Leading from the Limelight Case Study

Key Players

Aaron – Chief Professional Development and Recruiting Officer, Newly Elected NALP President-Elect

Ryan – Senior Manager of Talent Development and Inclusion (Lieutenant to Aaron)

Jessica – Manager of Legal Recruiting (Entry level recruiting only, well liked but will do the bare minimum at times)

Stella – Recruiting Coordinator (Two years in role, “go-getter”, thinks ahead and supports PD areas as well)

Brian – Recruiting Coordinator (Five years in role, well established relationships at firm, but tends to gossip)

Nikki – Professional Development Coordinator (New to the Team, Abilities untested)

Cameron – Professional Development and Recruiting Assistant (Incredibly efficient, helpful to all, frustrated by lack of pay and role increase but never lets it impact his work)

Fred – solid team member, reliable

Marcy – solid team member, reliable

Labor and Employment Group leader (unnamed) – just joined the firm with his group, wants to work with Ryan to develop and deliver diversity focused CLEs and client pitches

Aya – Ryan’s 10 year old daughter, is missing mommy and upset that mom has missed several soccer games and class events

Xavier – Ryan’s 16 year old son, not doing great in school

Kelly – Ryan’s partner, has been complaining that they haven’t been on vacation in a long time

Alex – head of litigation, worried that litigation revenue is down

Setting the Stage

Ryan was sitting in her office when her boss, Aaron, came in to announce that he was selected for the NALP president-elect position. Ryan and her boss have a good working relationship, although their styles are polar opposites, for the most part they complement each other and together they help the office run smoothly. Ryan is second in command in the office, although her title doesn’t necessarily provide her with the authority to make office decisions (she asked for a new title during last year’s annual review, but was summarily turned down without explanation, she’s still a little bitter about that, but she loves her job, so she pushes on). Ryan is

generally well respected in the office and in the firm. Ryan gets along pretty well with most of the others on the team.

As Ryan goes about her day, she begins to think about what Aaron's upcoming presidency will mean for her. She thinks about Jessica. Jessica has been in the office longer than Ryan, but doesn't seem motivated to take on additional responsibilities, or evolve the level of service she is currently providing. Although it was several years ago, Jessica wanted Ryan's position, and Ryan thinks she hasn't really let go of this feeling of resentment. Ryan is afraid that with Aaron's upcoming travel schedule, Jessica will be even less motivated to perform at her best or to jump in to cover any slack. Jessica's role in the office is somewhat cyclical, but Jessica's busy period overlaps with Ryan's busiest time of year, and there is no way Ryan could do both jobs.

Ryan also thinks about Cameron. Cameron is the office administrative assistant. Cameron is great, friendly, helpful, a go-getter, and well-liked. But, he is already operating at maximum capacity and the office hasn't given Cameron a significant raise in a couple years (due to budget constraints). With the added pressure of Aaron's presidency, Cameron may leave. Ryan is sure that someone with his skills would be in high demand.

As Ryan thinks about other solid staff members on her team, she thinks that Fred and Marcy are solid workers, they both do a great job, seem to have excellent balance and she isn't worried about how they will react to the upcoming pressure, she hopes they will be willing to jump in to cover projects where needed.

And then there is Brian. Brian has been very vocal about the lackluster raises over the past few years, he actively and loudly protests any time Ryan makes a decision, and undermines the cohesion in the office by gossiping, not just with others in the office, but with anyone who will listen in other departments. Ryan also thinks Brian is dating someone who was a summer associate last summer and has accepted an offer to return to the firm after graduation, but she doesn't have any hard evidence.

In stark contrast to Brian, is Stella. She's two years into her role, but she is primed for quick advancement, eager to take on more work and executes on every project with incredible insight and efficiency. Stella recently got engaged and is excited to be planning her wedding for next April.

Finally, she thinks about Nikki. Nikki has been with the team just one month. She made it through the interview process with flying colors, although the process was expedited because the office is so short staffed. Ryan wishes they would have vetted her a little more, since she will be the one to have to train her. Nikki's job is new to the office, so the actual role and responsibilities are being made up as they go. Ryan has not yet made a determination if Nikki is up to the entrepreneurial challenge of a new role.

The more Ryan thinks about the upcoming year, the more worried she gets. While Ryan fully respects Aaron, she knows that Aaron's leadership style is non-confrontational. He tends to

mull over decisions for a long time, and sometimes he doesn't follow through as well as Ryan would like in communicating his decisions to others in the office. Sometimes he is disorganized, and sometimes she feels like he doesn't take her concerns seriously. From time to time it feels to Ryan like Aaron is intentionally withholding information, and Ryan hates that Aaron only rarely provides critical feedback.

Others in the office have also complained about Aaron's leadership style, but no one is willing to approach the topic with Aaron, and Aaron seems to be so well loved by the firm's leadership that no one is willing to talk to anyone else about it either. Notwithstanding the way she and some of her office mates feel about Aaron, he appears to be loved by everyone outside the firm, and without a doubt he will be a great NALP president, his stage presence, and "political" prowess is second to none, but Ryan is afraid that getting anything done in his absence will be like trying to run through quicksand, unless she goes "rogue" more often.

On top of that, the firm's management committee recently added several new members who have already expressed an interest in getting to know the work of this department better, and with Aaron out of the office so much, it is likely to fall on Ryan to provide that insight and interaction. While Ryan feels confident in her ability to do this, she just doesn't know if there are enough hours in the day to do that and her regular 9-5. Ryan also suspects that the new members of the committee have some changes in mind that may not be very popular (there have been rumors of a merger). Ryan knows that there isn't any budget to hire even temporary help.

Ryan is also worried about the new NALP guidelines on reimbursing candidates, and leaving offers open. The rules, while not a substantial change, will require training for the office. Additionally, the firm has set new recruiting targets around diversity and judicial clerkships, and it will fall on Ryan to make sure everyone is aware of them. Finally, the new labor and employment group that moved to the firm from another firm has been trying to schedule time with Ryan to discuss several of their key clients and partnering with Ryan's team to present more diverse pitch teams and CLEs for their top clients. While both of those things fall into Ryan's basket, they seem like more work than they are worth at the moment because Ryan would have to create all the new content and get to know a whole new team of lawyers.

As 2pm approaches, Ryan realizes that she hasn't eaten lunch. She grabs her lunch bag, and quickly realizes that she packed her daughter's lunch in her box, which means Aya must have her lunch ... a discovery that is sure to be disappointing to Aya. Aya is only 10, but has recently been complaining that mommy has missed all her soccer games and the class pizza party for winning the most books read award. In contrast, Xavier has become more withdrawn. At 16 he's been spending more time with friends, and his grades, while not dramatically worse, are moving in the wrong direction. Ryan has been meaning to schedule time with his teachers, but she keeps having to reschedule. Ryan's partner, Kelly, has also been complaining about Ryan's schedule and the fact that they haven't been on a vacation, either with kids or without, in over two years. Besides being busy at work, Ryan can't fathom the idea of getting into a bathing

suit, or trying to squeeze into ski pants that are several years old ... she hasn't followed through on her commitment to herself to prioritize her exercise and nutrition either. Now that Aaron will be out more often, Ryan definitely can't commit to a vacation, she's not even sure she can commit to her own professional development, and makes a note to cancel the two training conferences she was hoping to attend, one in the fall and one early next year.

As she finishes Aya's ham and cheese with mayo sandwich and Oreos, she notices that her unread emails are up to 97, and there are 6 new voicemails. She's been distracted thinking about Aaron's new role all morning and hasn't made any progress on her own NALP Bulletin article. Although the deadline is Friday, she sets that down and starts fighting the email fires. She might listen to voicemails later, but she thinks to herself, if the messages are that important they will either call again or send an email.

At 6pm, Ryan's friend Alex stops by to see if Ryan is planning to attend the firm cocktail party to celebrate the new Labor and Employment group. As much as Ryan was dreading it because she'd be forced to talk to the practice group leader about all the phone calls and emails she's been dodging, Ryan had actually forgotten all about it. She sends a quick text to the babysitter to let her know she will be late (the third time in two weeks), locks her laptop and grabs her coat. On the way to the cocktail party Alex, the head of litigation for the Chicago office of the firm, tells Ryan in confidence that overall revenue in litigation is down because clients are sending more work than Alex had anticipated to e-discovery service providers. Alex wonders out loud what can be done about that.

Discussion Questions

1. With everything going on within the team and at home, how might Ryan or someone in her situation create communication with her boss?
2. These new additional duties will take Ryan's already busy schedule to a whole new level. How can she help ensure the team steps up? How might she motivate them, knowing that due to firm economics there will only be a 3.1% raise for everyone – even the top performers?
3. What role does Ryan's family play in her decision making? How can she prioritize the needs of her partner and children?
4. What role does Ryan's health and wellness play? How can she do better at scheduling time for herself?
5. What strategies might Ryan consider in managing the team in the office?
6. Is Ryan neglecting anyone/anything important? If so, what are the consequences of doing so?