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## DIAMONDS IN THE DUST: WHY LAWYERS MAKE THE IDEAL CANDIDATE FOR CEO

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❖ NOTE ❖

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### I. INTRODUCTION

One might expect that after completing three years of law school the next step would be to enter into a law firm and practice law until retirement. Yet that idea is changing. Lawyers are no longer just becoming lawyers.<sup>1</sup> In reality, lawyers are using their degree for so much more—and one destination for them is all the way at the top: Chief Executive Officer (CEO). This paper acknowledges that lawyers that become CEO make a difference. But it is not due to external factors, but rather the skill sets innate to lawyers that allow them to get to the top.

### II. BACKGROUND

#### *A. The Path*

The unique skill sets of lawyers have set them apart as professionals who can become leaders of organizations. This skill set is often seen in U.S. presidents, where a majority had a legal degree.<sup>2</sup> But even more than the political field, lawyers thrive in the business sector as well, specifically as CEO. A CEO, or Chief Executive Officer, is an individual at the top of the organization who, along with his C-Suite, work to shape the organization and achieve success in the present but also invest in the long term for the company.<sup>3</sup> Lawyers in the role

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1. Leanne Fuith, *Creating the Lawyer as Business Leader*, 43 MITCHELL HAMLINE L. REV. 1095, 1096 (2017), <https://open.mitchellhamline.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1106&context=mhhr>.

2. Kevin H. Michels, *Our Hidden Value*, 53 U. LOUISVILLE L. REV. 1, 19 (2014)

3. A.G. Lafley, *What Only the CEO Can Do*, HARV. BUS. REV. (May 2009), <https://hbr.org/2009/05/what-only-the-ceo-can-do>.

of CEO were common as they were able to meet the job requirements of a CEO. In fact, Harvard Law used to produce more CEOs than its business counterpart.<sup>4</sup>

The most common way of getting to the position of CEO was to start off as a lawyer in a firm and gain enough experience to move into general counsel positions.<sup>5</sup> The general counsel position allowed lawyers to gain a deeper understanding of the non-legal side of their business.<sup>6</sup> As general counsel, a lawyer transforms into not just an individual involved with the legal side of the company but the operational side as well, essentially making such positions a training ground for future CEOs.<sup>7</sup> Often times, the general counsel is tapped into for a non-legal position in the company with the potential to grow.<sup>8</sup> This opportunity is pretty common as lawyers in executive positions make up 44% of major companies.<sup>9</sup> As these lawyers gain more experience on the operational side of their companies, they also gain opportunities to move up the corporate ladder. Other times, partners at major firms are tapped into by an organization due to the outside counsel's familiarity with the company.<sup>10</sup> From here on out these lawyers either become CEOs or try to move up the corporate ladder from their executive positions to CEO. However, despite starting at different points, one thing that makes all of these lawyers similar is that they have gained a firm understanding of the organization before being asked to lead.

From a lawyer's perspective, lawyers make a move into leadership because they want the challenge of going from being merely an advisor to a decision maker.<sup>11</sup> They aim to become CEOs because they have a drive that makes them want to be more than just a lawyer. They also get the opportunity to become more creative and look for solutions outside of a client's demands.<sup>12</sup> Lawyers, after spending time in law firms, also prefer to think more long-term about their future and where they want to retire.<sup>13</sup> The benefits and work of a CEO calls out to the above considerations, sometimes moreso than that of more senior law firm positions.<sup>14</sup>

### B. The Problem

Although lawyers can make it to the top, the perception of lawyers and their negative stereotypes have contributed to a small number of lawyers turned CEOs.<sup>15</sup> As shown in

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4. Larry Smith, *Lawyer-CEOs: No Predictable Attitudes Concerning Legal Function*, OF COUNSEL, July 20, 1992, at 28.

5. Irene Taylor, *Crossing Over: Lawyers as Corporate Executives*, FINDLAW, (March 26, 2008), <https://corporate.findlaw.com/litigation-disputes/crossing-over-lawyers-as-corporate-executives.html>.

6. Ben W. Heineman Jr., *Resolving the Partner-Guardian Tension: The Key to General Counsel Independence*, 42 DEL. J. CORP. L. 149, 156 (2017).

7. David Felicissimo, *A Seat at the Head of the Table: From Lawyer to CEO?*, ACC DOCKET, July/August 2017, at 24.

8. Mark Curriden, *Ceo, Esq. Why Lawyers Are Being Asked to Lead Some of the Nation's Largest Corporations*, A.B.A. J. May 2010, at 30.

9. Adair Morse ET. AL., *Executive Lawyers: Gatekeepers or Strategic Officers?*, 59 J.L. & ECON. 847, 847 (2016).

10. Taylor, *supra* note 5.

11. *Id.*

12. Felicissimo, *supra* note 7.

13. Taylor, *supra* note 5.

14. *Id.*

15. Smith, *supra* note 4.

Exhibit A, JDs only made up a small fraction of Fortune 500 CEOs.<sup>16</sup> Looking deeper, Exhibit B shows that there were only 9 lawyer-CEOs among the Fortune 100, as per 2019.<sup>17</sup>

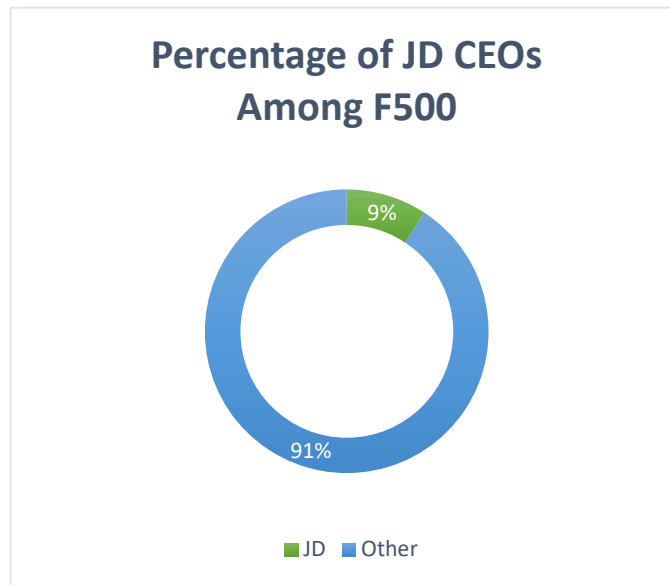


Exhibit A

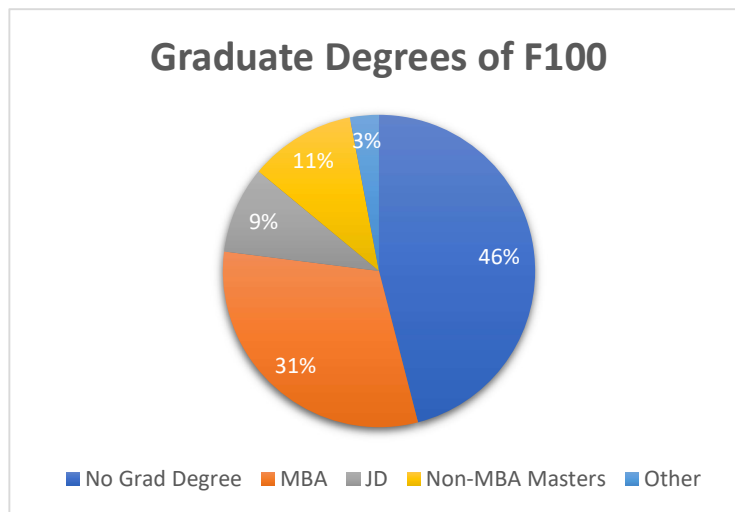


Exhibit B

16. Menachem Wecker, *Where the Fortune 500 CEOs Went to Law School*, US NEWS & WORLD REPORT, (June 26, 2012, 7:00 AM), <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-graduate-schools/top-law-schools/articles/2012/06/26/where-the-fortune-500-ceos-went-to-law-school>.

17. Kimberly A. Whitley, *New Fortune 100 CEO Study: The Top Graduate Schools Attended By Fortune 100 CEOs*, Forbes, (Sep 28, 2019, 03:03pm), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kimberlywhitley/2019/09/28/new-fortune-100-ceo-study-the-top-graduate-schools-attended-by-fortune-100-ceos/#1519a16c2719>.

The negative reputation of lawyers mainly stems from the view that they are too cautious and risk averse.<sup>18</sup> Other times people rationalize that lawyer-CEOs are only needed in industries with high regulations or when a company is facing legal trouble.<sup>19</sup> It is true that lawyer-CEOs are slightly more common in utility companies that deal with a large number of regulations and insurance companies that deal with contract selling.<sup>20</sup> Yet there are still some companies that take lawyers as CEOs outside of the utility and insurance industry.<sup>21</sup> Despite all of this, the negative perception of lawyers takes away from the fact that lawyers make great leaders.<sup>22</sup> When given the opportunity lawyers can become “dynamic and persistent” leaders.<sup>23</sup> They have a skill set with factors that make them adaptable to the demands of CEO positions. They are not simply useful in times when a company is in legal need.<sup>24</sup> Rather their distinctive perspective allows them to bring immeasurable benefit to the organization in which they lead.

### C. The Benefit

Lawyers bring to a company a different outlook on looking at problems and coming to solutions. They approach a problem much differently than someone who has a business background. This unique point of view has led to positive benefits for companies in which lawyers hold high positions. For instance, lawyers as directors increase firm value by as high as 9.5%.<sup>25</sup> More specifically, in a study conducted by the Harvard Business School of 3500 CEOs within which 9% had a JD, lawyer-CEOs decreased their companies’ litigation by anywhere between 16 to 74%.<sup>26</sup> Lawyer CEOs have also helped rise firm value in high growth firms with large litigation.<sup>27</sup> They can also enhance shareholder wealth by maximizing the use of their skills as well.<sup>28</sup>

Besides numeric value, there is a deeper reason as to why lawyers-CEOs are beneficial. Naturally, a CEO spends about 25% of her time considering legal issues.<sup>29</sup> This is due to the fact that the business industry as a whole has become increasingly complex as laws change and regulation fluctuates. Furthermore, industries are increasingly converging and blurring the line between what is considered law and what is considered business.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, lawyers who are able to navigate this duality become invaluable to organizations. Lawyers also have the ability to understand that the law can be so much more than a constraint. Instead, lawyer CEOs can find ways to have the law add value to a firm as a competitive

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18. Michels, *supra* note 2, at 20.

19. Bill Mordan, *Lawyers As Ceos*, ACC DOCKET, May 2007, at 108, 108.

20. Smith, *supra* note 4.

21. See Curriden, *supra* note 8, at 35.

22. Michels, *supra* note 2, at 24.

23. Robert C. Bird, *Law, Strategy, and Competitive Advantage*, 44 CONN. L. REV. 61, 90 (2011).

24. Michels, *supra* note 2, at 24.

25. Lubomir P. Litov ET. AL., *Lawyers and Fools: Lawyer-Directors in Public Corporations*, 102 GEO. L.J. 413, 414 (2014).

26. M. Todd Henderson *Do Lawyers Make Better CEOs Than MBAs?*, HARV. BUS. REV. (8/24/2017), <https://hbr.org/2017/08/do-lawyers-make-better-ceos-than-mbas>.

27. *Id.*

28. Constance E. Bagley, *What's Law Got to Do with It?: Integrating Law and Strategy*, 47 AM. BUS. L.J. 587, 587 (2010).

29. Bird, *supra* note 23, at 64.

30. Michels, *supra* note 2, at 19.

advantage.<sup>31</sup> They can turn regulations into opportunities and protect the organization's resources.<sup>32</sup> Taking these benefits into consideration, it seems logical to tap into lawyers as a source of leadership for corporations.

### III. ANALYSIS

Lawyers are different than other professionals climbing up the corporate ladder but three specific factors stand out to make lawyers better candidates to lead an organization. The first is the education that the lawyers receive—the skills that lawyers learn in communication and analysis are useful for CEOs to effectively communicate better solutions with shareholders and other executives. Secondly lawyers make better corporate players because of their ability to analyze legal risks—while normally seen as a negative characteristic, understanding legal risks is actually beneficial in our increasingly complex world. Lastly, lawyer CEOs are incredibly valuable for their ability to combine their legal knowledge with their business acumen to create unique competitive skillsets.

#### A. Education

In distinguishing a lawyer as a viable choice for an effective corporate leader, the educational component of a lawyer is the foundation to which the other factors are supported by. After all, legal education creates lawyers not just by imparting skills onto them but by introducing a whole new way of thinking.<sup>33</sup> A lawyer's education can be split into two categories: praxis knowledge and normative knowledge.<sup>34</sup> Praxis knowledge are the lawyer's practical capabilities such as how to analyze issues and the capacity to learn in different circumstances.<sup>35</sup> Praxis knowledge is often linked to applying the law. On the other end, normative knowledge is the ability to navigate through competing interests and issues to reach optimal solutions.<sup>36</sup> It is the combination of these two that when applied make a lawyer a worthwhile choice for CEO.

#### 1. Praxis Capabilities

Praxis knowledge is what lawyers are routinely used to; it is the ability to research and apply information. In learning this, lawyers are taught through a case method.<sup>37</sup> This means that students receive a problem with a solution that is already given, but the student has to figure out how that solution was met and conversely why that solution was not met.<sup>38</sup> This differentiates to typically business-oriented students that are more accustomed to balancing

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31. Bagely, *supra* note 28, at 588.

32. Bird, *supra* note 23, at 69.

33. Smith, *supra* note 4.

34. See Michels, *supra* note 2, at 1 (discusses the praxis and normative capabilities of lawyers).

35. *Id.* at 3.

36. *Id.* at 1.

37. Richard A. Kaplan, *Toward Better Communications Between Executives and Lawyers*, UTAH B.J. July/August 2011, at 18.

38. *Id.*

singular interests.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, the method taught to business school students have students making decisions and rigidly sticking to their decisions. The method that lawyers learn from allow them to look at problems from both sides, and be objective in understanding why a certain answer works for a certain problem.<sup>40</sup> This method of thinking pushes a lawyer to have a more disciplined thought process.<sup>41</sup>

Law schools have also taught their students a baseline understanding of the business world, and some go further by teaching more advanced concepts like transactions and deal-making.<sup>42</sup> Though this education does not guarantee that every law student has the requisite skill set to take on business functions, it at least allows for a good starting point for law students to grow. More particularly, law schools with curriculums that focus on public policy and business law help mold lawyers into effective business leaders.<sup>43</sup> As government regulations increase, every member of organizations have to increasingly deal with business operations; law schools have listened and created curriculums that allow law students to learn and be better suited for this change.<sup>44</sup> The praxis knowledge given by law schools has integrated business topics to make their students more prepared for the business world.<sup>45</sup>

Legal training, both in school and practice, also prepares lawyers to delve into and analyze problems typically faced by CEOs in particular. Lawyers by nature are known to look at problems from every angle. CEOs need to similarly break down issues and analyze every corner of their business, which include outside factors that more junior members may not need to consider.<sup>46</sup> The transition from business employee to CEO is immense since it requires a shift from years of singular problem solving to a position that requires multifactored and multidisciplinary solution building. Here, lawyer-CEOs are much more valuable because they are able to look past the single thought of profit maximization<sup>47</sup> and understand what exactly problems consist of in order to get to better solutions.

It is true that the process of analysis could become a burden in decision making when CEOs have to make quick decisions.<sup>48</sup> Yet lawyers have been shown to thrive in situations of high pressure and with vast amounts of data.<sup>49</sup> Part of what law school teaches its students—and an essential function of the court system—is to make complex decisions in a short amount of time in regard to public policy based on limited available information.<sup>50</sup> As such, lawyers are even more so prepared for CEO roles due to their ability to employ their complex problem solving skills under pressure.<sup>51</sup>

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39. *Id.*

40. Mike France & Louis Lavelle, *A Compelling Case For Lawyer-CEOs*, BLOOMBERG NEWS, 88, 90 (December 12, 2004, 11:00 PM), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2004-12-12/a-compelling-case-for-lawyer-ceos>.

41. Smith, *supra* note 4.

42. Fuiith, *supra* note 1, at 1097.

43. Curriden, *supra* note 8, at 33.

44. Bagely, *supra* note 28, at 633.

45. Curriden *supra* note 8, at 33.

46. *Id.*

47. Felicissimo, *supra* note 7, at 25.

48. Heineman, *supra* note 6, at 161.

49. Felicissimo, *supra* note 7.

50. Curriden, *supra* note 8, at 33.

51. Felicissimo, *supra* note 7, at 29.

## 2. Normative Capabilities

Lawyers are naturally used to working within given boundaries. A lawyer works to understand her client's request and work within that request to reach to the end goal.<sup>52</sup> In order to understand what the client wants—the lawyer asks questions and grapples with different opposing factors to get to the client's end goal and also guide the client into taking the right path.<sup>53</sup> To do this, lawyers apply normative reasoning to balance competing tensions between many parties. This position that many lawyers face is very similar to the positions faced by CEOs.<sup>54</sup> Specifically, CEOs are in a position to achieve the goal of multiple parties such as their employees, their board of directors, and the public as a whole. For instance, the board is worried about compensation and the public image of the company.<sup>55</sup> The public is worried about how socially conscious companies are.<sup>56</sup> A lawyer-CEO can use normative capabilities from their experience to wrestle with these different competing interests. It is these normative capacities that play a central role in decision and policy making.<sup>57</sup>

The development of normative capabilities comes from lawyers who have conversations and reflections on different ideas over the course of their career.<sup>58</sup> Lawyers have plenty of these opportunities through reading cases, crafting direct and opposing arguments between multiple parties, and developing greater theories and narratives.<sup>59</sup> These opportunities start in law school but grow as lawyers begin their real practice. The compounding of these ideas allows a lawyer to tell stories with coherent themes. Similarly, lawyer-CEOs have the ability to use normative capacities to get their normative point across. When a lawyer-CEO is able to communicate her position and tell the story she wants to tell, it assists in the success of achieving the company's objectives.<sup>60</sup>

A roadblock that lawyers may face in their normative reasoning is in properly communicating their ideas. This can be overcome through how lawyers learn to understand one's audience.<sup>61</sup> Lawyers have many opportunities to learn and adjust the way they question and communicate rigorously with clients—making lawyers progressively better at reaching client and stakeholder objectives.<sup>62</sup> These further communication skills allow lawyer CEOs to actually apply their normative reasoning with clear and sufficient facts and background delineated through conversations and research. Once effective communication is established, normative reasoning can be applied to reach tactical and strategically informed decisions and use them to grow a successful company.<sup>63</sup>

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52. Michels, *supra* note 2, at 17.

53. *Id.*

54. *Id.* at 1.

55. Mordan, *supra* note 19.

56. Michels, *supra* note 2, at 21.

57. *Id.*

58. *Id.* at 32.

59. *Id.* at 11.

60. Mordan, *supra* note 19.

61. Kaplan, *supra* note 37.

62. France & Lavelle, *supra* note 40.

63. Michels, *supra* note 2, at 21.

### B. Risk Management

While a lawyer-CEO's praxis reasoning, normative reasoning, and communication skills play a vast role in her success, so too does her ability to manage risks. Indeed, risk analysis is inherent in a lawyer's practice and becomes a major pillar in her work.<sup>64</sup> In a business setting, risk management skills provide an increased advantage to a lawyer turned CEO and the organization. These skills provide positive outcomes to the organization and assist decision making in crucial times. Despite the negative connotations of risk management, especially in the context of lawyers, risk management ultimately becomes a benefit for the organization in the long run.

The cultivation of risk analysis happens early on in a young lawyer's profession. Legal training provides lawyers with the capabilities of analyzing risks before determining whether the client should go forward with an action or not.<sup>65</sup> Lawyers learn early on what to look for when making decisions. They make sure to look for all the possible options before making a decision, which includes many factors not considered in simple business contexts.<sup>66</sup> Additionally, lawyers learn to make decisions in difficult and uncertain situations. More specifically, lawyers thrive in unfamiliar situations and they often use risk analysis as a tool to overcome these situations.<sup>67</sup> This specialized way of risk management sets lawyers apart from individuals with a business background who have trouble making decisions when there is uncertainty and unfamiliarity with a situation.<sup>68</sup> These risk management skills help guide lawyer-CEOs through difficult situations. Furthermore, lawyer-CEOs have used their risk management skills to positively respond to changes and evolving uncertainty. For instance, with the passing of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, companies that had lawyer-CEOs experienced a positive market response since their CEOs' legal backgrounds helped them sift through the increasingly complex legal and regulatory framework.<sup>69</sup>

These risk analysis skills as applied to a business context also provide organizations benefits on a macro-level. In industries with high regulations, lawyer CEOs are successful because they have a better understanding of the business within those legal obstacles.<sup>70</sup> Stringent legal enforcement and high compliance in an industry would effectively make the lawyer-CEO a prized asset in a company.<sup>71</sup> Yet the industries with high regulations are not the only industries that benefit from risk analyzing lawyer-CEOs. Indeed there has been a push towards risk management outside industries that deal with high regulations.<sup>72</sup> As the business world and the law start blurring together, the benefit of a lawyer at the top of the pyramid goes up as well.<sup>73</sup> An individual with experience in both business and law can handle the blurry line between these two fields, especially more so than a CEO with a non-

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64. Fuiith, *supra* note 1, at 1097.

65. Henderson, *supra* note 26.

66. Felicissimo, *supra* note 7, at 27.

67. *Id.*

68. Mordan, *supra* note 19.

69. Henderson, *supra* note 26.

70. France & Lavelle, *supra* note 40.

71. Henderson, *supra* note 26.

72. Curriden, *supra* note 8, at 33.

73. *Id.*



legal background. This is seen easily when looking at the numbers of lawyer-CEOs who reduce corporate litigation anywhere between 16 to 74%.<sup>74</sup>

However lawyers are still criticized for being risk adverse and overly cautious.<sup>75</sup> It is true that lawyers, especially at law firms, must find risks and break them down.<sup>76</sup> As such, lawyers may be seen as less aggressive in accrual and recognizing revenue at a much slower rate as compared to their competitors.<sup>77</sup> Yet a lawyer-CEO's risk management skills do not make her averse to all risk. Rather, studies show that lawyer-CEOs have the same stock purchasing habits as regular CEOs.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, individuals in non-legal roles should also be considering the kinds of risks lawyers are accustomed to when looking at business solutions.<sup>79</sup> Lawyer-CEOs are not risk averse, rather they are simply risk managing in the same way other business roles should. As such, lawyers constrained by the law actually have an advantage since their specialized knowledge of risk allows them to reach innovative solutions.<sup>80</sup> In the CEO context, it becomes a competitive advantage to be able to come up with innovative solutions in constraining situations. Risk is innate to the position of CEO, and a lawyer who is able to clearly understand and work around risk becomes a perfect match for that position.

### C. Potential

Lawyers also have good potential to grow into the position of CEO. While education plays a major factor, the ability for lawyers to learn effectively throughout their entire career plays the greatest role in becoming CEO. Lawyers can grow into leadership positions because they have the ability to familiarize with new ideas and topics at a rapid pace. Secondly, they have the ability to adapt to a myriad of different situations and learn to work within those situations. By successfully transporting these factors to the business world, a lawyer can grow into the position of CEO.

Lawyers, by nature, are quick to pick up information. As laws and circumstances change, lawyers are required to learn new ideas and arguments for all the issues pertaining to their field. This skill is taught to them early on in their professional career through continuing legal education (CLE) requirements. In applying this to a corporate setting, the willingness, drive, and necessity to pick up information about a company and its operations, as well as the legal topics surrounding the business, are beneficial in making lawyers great CEOs.<sup>81</sup> It is this ability to learn that puts lawyer-CEOs on the same playing field as regular CEOs before even taking on the position.

A lawyer's potential to grow also comes from the fact that they are adaptable. Early in their career, lawyers learn how to do their job by actually going out and working. Education

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74. Henderson, *supra* note 26.

75. Ben W. Lewis, et al., *Difference in Degrees: CEO Characteristics and Firm Environmental Disclosure*, 35 STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT J. 712, 715 (2014).

76. Felicissimo, *supra* note 7, at 27.

77. Henderson, *supra* note 26.

78. Joel Kaidesoja, *Lawyer CEOs and Corporate Risk-Taking* Aalto Univ. 1,60 (2018).

79. Bagely, *supra* note 28, at 633.

80. *Id.* at 593.

81. France & Lavelle, *supra* note 40.

teaches the necessary praxis, normative, and communication skills, but the real education is done through on the job training. Through this, lawyers learn to be quick and adaptable on legal work outside the law school. Additionally, lawyers become confident in rapidly familiarizing themselves to new information, often through uncontrollable changes and circumstances from courts, markets, and third parties. This often leads lawyers to face legal issues in different industries, fields, and contexts, eventually turning them into multifaceted experts.<sup>82</sup> Transferring this skill to the corporate world, lawyers learn to adapt to the nature of their companies and the many different issues concerning them. Lawyers learn to adapt to the culture and values of the organization, an important feature in understanding the organization. Lawyers also adapt to the barrage of new problems that companies eventually face, making them efficient leaders that bring a competitive advantage to the company.<sup>83</sup>

Learning and adaptability often close the gap between lawyers and those with a non-legal background. Though there are some knowledge gaps and obstacles to adapting, the responsibilities of CEOs are nothing out of the ordinary for many lawyers.<sup>84</sup> For instance, CEOs have to understand how to manage conflict between parties and their diverse interests in the company.<sup>85</sup> Lawyer-CEOs are well prepared for this responsibility. A combination of a lawyer's praxis, normative, and communication skills mentioned above create a unique and ideal skill set that is capable of balancing diversity and complexity to reach optimal solutions.

#### IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Lawyers are well-suited to be CEOs and those that have reached that position have made positive impacts to their companies and industries. Yet despite meeting the requisite bar to become CEO, lawyer-CEOs are still lacking. Lawyers continue to be a large pool of untapped potential. In order to address this problem and to push lawyers into becoming CEOs, there are two recommendations that should be implemented. For one, there needs to be an increase in mentoring of lawyers to help hone skills and entertain the possibility of becoming a CEO. Secondly, there needs to be a change in the perception of lawyers by the business world as a whole. The combination of these two steps opens up a pathway for more lawyers to rise to the top and bring about the positive impacts that they are capable of enacting.

##### *A. Guiding the Next Generation*

Lawyer often have the skills to become CEOs, but they will need assistance from mentors to help guide them along the way. Taylor writes that mentorship can be seen as an almost critical success factor for lawyer-CEOs.<sup>86</sup> This statement, while broad, is true—mentors are essential in showing lawyers the possibilities available to them and are thus resources to help lawyers see the role of CEO as attainable and worthwhile.

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82. Smith, *supra* note 4.

83. Bird, *supra* note 23, at 68.

84. Michels, *supra* note 2, at 23.

85. *Id.* at 21.

86. Taylor, *supra* note 5.

Mentors often play a role in the molding of a lawyer. They help lawyers hone their skills to adapt to the business sector. They assist in helping the lawyer to think differently or approach problems in a different solution. Other times they push lawyers to think about the big picture rather than just on the one goal in front of them. In accordance with this, mentors in the business sector, lawyer or not, become vital because they have the knowledge and experience to guide young lawyers. They offer advice and wisdom to lawyers trying to get to CEO.

Mentors also become important resources when moving up the corporate ladder. Their connections and network become the lawyer's way to be recognized. The recommendation of a mentor can often lead to opportunities for lawyers to move in a non-legal capacity. Other times mentors can provide the reference to organizations for lawyers in executive positions. These mentorships often influence the path of a lawyer and vouch to individuals in the organizations about the capabilities that lawyers have.

While law schools and firms have a mentorship program, there are rarely any instances of mentors training lawyers to enter into a position in a non-legal capacity. For one, there are not that many lawyer-CEOs to guide other lawyers. This void of mentors makes it harder for a lawyer to get to the top as they have to learn to hone their skills on their own. As a result, lawyers in non-legal positions need to take a step forward and vouch for the capabilities that lawyers have. The impact and training of lawyers early on in seeing CEO as a possible career path influences skills and connects lawyers to those experienced in the business world. It is important to nurture the idea of lawyers becoming CEOs in young lawyers so they can meet a mentor that can help them hone their skills for the position if they so desire.

### *B. Making a Seat at the table*

While lawyers have the skills to rise to the top, they still need an opportunity to demonstrate those skills. Often times, the pressure of prejudice makes it difficult for lawyers to rise into management and break into the inner circle. Mentors assist them, but there is still a gap due to the perception of lawyers ingrained in those within an organization. As mentioned in this note, various stereotypes make it difficult for lawyers to display their skills. Yet by normalizing the idea of lawyers as leaders changes the perception and opens up opportunities for lawyers.

Lawyers are seen as individuals who say no often and generally as deal breakers. They often get boxed into the role of lawyer and are relegated to only dealing with legal issues. This boxed in persona leads to a waste of good resources for an organization. However, by opening up positions to lawyers in more than just a legal capacity leads to a changed perception by those around them. Others start to view lawyers as problem solvers who can work on non-legal issues. This in turn also allows them to work in the business operations of things. As Kaplan puts it, the experience for lawyers to work on other projects in non-legal capacities essentially becomes training grounds for lawyers to become effective executives and even more so to be worthwhile candidates for CEO for that company.<sup>87</sup> Kaplan is correct

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87. Kaplan, *supra* note 37.

in stating that lawyers get a lot of their skills and their potential to grow by being able to learn and work with those around them in a non-legal capacity.

Secondly, perceptions change by easing communication between the legal sector of the company and the rest of the organization. Lawyers are often seen as the untouchable part of the company that are only present to deal with legal issues. Yet by creating an effective communicative environment between the lawyers of the company and other individuals, the lawyer becomes an approachable individual for those in the non-legal sector of the company. Fuith writes how changing the communication between lawyers and those within a business sector allows for lawyers to adapt to the way people with a non-legal background speak and vice versa.<sup>88</sup> This two-way communication change also builds trust and allows lawyers the opening to build relationships with those outside the legal sector. A change in communication leads to the change in perception of lawyers among those within the organization. This also leads to those individuals naturally creating an opportunity for a lawyer to partake in non-legal issues within a company—an opportunity for lawyers to showcase their skills that make them valuable beyond being just a lawyer.

Changing perceptions is not an easy process. Rather it takes time and different opportunities to make lawyers more approachable. It would require more of an input from lawyers in a non-legal capacity. It also requires more opportunity for the business operation side of companies to communicate with the legal departments. Steps such as this are a long process but end up with positive results in the end. This process makes lawyers trustworthy to the greater workforce and helps others realize their potential. It also opens up doors for lawyers to move into non-legal capacities because of the skills they have demonstrated to their coworkers. This relationship essentially becomes the foundation of lawyers moving into the position of CEO.

## V. CONCLUSION

It is time to rethink the idea that lawyers are not good corporate leaders. Once prejudices are overcome and lawyers are given a seat at the table, they can become effective leaders in an organization. Their blend of talents makes them an asset for any organization to gain a competitive advantage in the industry, making them worthy of taking on the high level responsibilities of CEOs.

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88. Fuith, *supra* note 1, at 1107.