Many partners complain of having lost the sense of involvement with the definition of firm goals or in formulating plans to reach those goals once they are set. On the other hand, those involved in firm management find it difficult to lead because there has been no mechanism in place for translating firm goals into personal actions by individual partners. An improvement in linking the needs of the firm and personal aspirations of its partners is critical to the future success of your firm, however that success might be measured.

Over the course of a year, each partner, practice group and office (whichever is applicable to your firm) should prepare an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of clients, matters, attorneys, legal specialties, reputation and a host of other variables. That assessment will be the basis for developing a plan, in the form of action steps, for overcoming weaknesses and for taking advantage of strengths in order to achieve the firm's "mission" or vision of itself. Those assessments and plans will be negotiated with the firm's managing committee and practice area leaders and when agreed upon, will become the basis for:

- individual partner goal setting, business development plans and initiatives, and accountability;
- providing for a better partner communication; and
- enhanced partner participation in setting direction for the firm.

At the beginning of the year, and each evaluation period thereafter, each partner will prepare performance targets to be negotiated with his practice group, or a member of the managing committee with the objective of determining how each partner can contribute to meeting the group or office goals for the following year. These meetings will provide each partner, group and office manager with an opportunity to participate in setting goals that are in harmony with each other and to which there is real and personal commitment by each partner.

Among the kinds of performance targets partners may be asked to set for themselves:
• quality of work product
• business generation
• training and supervision of other lawyers
• billing and collection efforts
• recruiting
• training
• cross selling
• participation in firm management
• community service
• billable hours
• efforts at premium billing
• client management
• operating leverage (delegation of work)
• writing, speaking and other matters relating to firm reputation and the like

Through discussion with each partner, the firm's goals can be met by asking somewhat different things of each one. The emphasis should be on seeking an equality of effort from each partner by recognizing each one's strengths, rather than reliance upon artificial goals such as those related to billable hours alone. One hopes that management can assist its partners in identifying areas of effort needed by the firm and how each partner can make his or her most useful contribution to the firm's joint efforts.

At the end of the evaluation period each partner will be asked to evaluate his performance against targets just as the firm management will be asked to do so for the part of the firm for which they have management responsibility. Naturally, good reasons may exist for significant variances between performance targets and their realization. The merit of this approach is that personal goals will be largely self-generated, yet will be consistent with the perceived needs of the firm.
The peer review program should be mandatory although not necessarily every year. As each partner reviews his actual performance against targets at the end of the evaluation period, he will be asked to comment on the contribution to the firm by partners with whom he has worked or whom he has observed. The following are typical questions which partners might be asked:

- Which partners have made a special contribution to the firm during the past year?
  - in the areas of client development
  - in the generation of extraordinary product or service for the firm's clients
  - in the area of training or recruiting
  - in the management of a client or matter
  - in the firm management

- What rewards do you think are appropriate for those partners who have contributed to the firm in an extraordinary manner?

- Which partners do not appear to be realizing their potential and in what areas?

- How do you believe the firm can help those partners who are not realizing their potential?

Peer review input will be integrated with partner evaluations of performance targets and comments from firm managers in determining compensation and in identifying partners who might be candidates for responsible client and firm leadership positions as well as those who should be disciplined in some way consistent with the firm culture.

Members of the management committee will participate in the development of the partners' personal plans, the evaluation of those plans and the integration of peer review comments so that they will be in an excellent position to evaluate contribution to the firm and to reflect that contribution in partner compensation. It is expected that the management committee will continue to exercise its judgment giving due consideration to the unique personal circumstances of each partner.