LEADERSHIP LABS: CASE # 2
ROLE B: SENIOR DIRECTOR

THE SITUATION IN BRIEF

You’re a Senior Director at a small technical consulting firm. Your clients are large companies in a variety of industries. Your firm develops close, long-term relationships with clients and works with only one client in a given industry. This business model allows your firm to charge substantial fees, but it also compels the firm to invest heavily in highly skilled and experienced employees.

Your colleagues typically have extensive technical and consulting backgrounds and joined this firm in order to apply their expertise in a flexible environment, working on longer, in-depth projects with a small number of clients. The firm’s business model depends on attracting star performers and retaining them over time, because consultants’ domain knowledge and client relationships allow the firm to meet clients’ needs efficiently and maintain high margins on its fees.

Last year you joined the firm after being personally recruited by the firm’s founder and Managing Partner. You have substantial technical expertise and a strong set of relationships with companies in industries that would be new markets for this firm, and during the recruiting process it was clear that the Managing Partner viewed you as an important source of new business.

You’ve spent your career at larger firms, and while you’ve enjoyed your work, you wanted a more flexible environment that would still be demanding but would also allow you to take more time off between projects. Your current firm seemed like a great fit for your needs, and when the Managing Partner mentioned the unlimited vacation policy, you decided to accept their offer.

This past year at your new firm has been intense but rewarding. You worked incredibly hard to
ensure that every project you participated in was a big success, and you’ve continued to cultivate your industry relationships.

You’re developing good relationships with your colleagues at the firm as well, although you’ve been surprised by a few things at the firm. You expected to be more involved in new business development because of your relationships at potential clients, but the management team seems more interested in winning additional projects at current clients. And despite the unlimited vacation policy that was a factor in your decision to take the job, people don’t appear to take much time off between projects. You’re concerned that the firm’s culture may not actually be as flexible as it appeared from the outside.

**The Challenge**

The Managing Partner has asked to talk with you, and your goal for the conversation is to reach an agreement that gives you confidence that the firm understand your needs. There are several potential strategies you can employ in this conversation:

- Ask to be more involved in new business development.
- Express concern that people aren’t taking time off despite the unlimited vacation policy.
- Conclude that it was a mistake to accept their offer and decide to leave the firm.
- Jointly explore additional solutions.