

# Leading a High-Stakes Trial Requires Believing In, Boosting Team

---

Sept. 16, 2025 | Michele Maryott

Trials, at first glance, may appear to follow a well-worn template: opening statements, presentation of evidence through direct and cross-examination, and closing arguments. While these fundamental elements provide the skeleton, the true art of trial work is found in the heart and soul—in the creativity, intense preparation, and dynamic teamwork amid the chaotic pace of a trial.

Successfully leading a trial team requires a blend of trust, collaboration, and the ability to bring out the best in each team member. As one of my mentors once told me, “If you get to the end and you can say you did everything you possibly could to the best of your ability, then you’ve done your job.”

I’ve taken those words to heart. And as a leader, I view getting the best out of the team as crucial to the mission. There’s no one-size-fits-all approach to leadership, of course, but there are a few tenets I strive to follow when trying a case.

**Believe.** Ted Lasso reminds us to “Believe.” It’s simple, yet so powerful. Successful trial teams live that mantra every day: Believe in our client, believe in each other, and believe in our ability to win.

**Play to team members’ strengths.** It’s tempting to provide a sports analogy here (there are so many to choose from), but the key is that every member of the team will be at their optimal performance level if they are doing what they are good at and enjoy. Those two things may not always be the same, but trying

to find that balance will lead to engaged and high-performing team members. Get to know your team, understand their strengths, leverage those strengths, and provide stretch opportunities wherever you can.

**Leave egos at the door.** Everyone on the team has personal goals for themselves and their careers. If they’ve been sharpening their skills, the opportunities to demonstrate them will come. But there is a very simple, guiding principle that is crucial to emphasize. That is, “this is never about us.” None of the work we do is about *us*. It is about our clients—believing in them and giving them our all—every day. When we embrace this simple fact, all of the other key elements that drive a successful team come easily.

**Remember we’re all human.** Everyone knows that trial is an incredibly intense, immersive experience. There are early mornings, late nights, a lot of stress, and uniquely high amounts of adrenaline flowing. But at the end of the day, we are all just people with varying degrees of physical and emotional limitations, and we all have lives outside of work. Our lives don’t stop when we set foot into the war room or the courtroom. Acknowledging that we are all human and encouraging team members to take a moment when they need it so they can return energized and with clear eyes is critical. As a leader, this requires being mindful of signs that someone needs that moment, acknowledging their struggles, and guiding them through.

**Know your audiences.** Media attention comes with the territory in a high-profile case, and it's important to be comfortable with that aspect of the trial. When we are crafting narratives, we know we are doing that not just for the judge and jury, but often the general public. And while media coverage doesn't drive strategy, it can provide helpful insight into whether a certain point or theme didn't land the way we expected.

**Have fun.** A trial lawyer's version of fun is a different kind of fun than most experience. We leave every trial with great stories about events on and off the courtroom stage. But having the everyday kind of fun with your team is a must; it relieves stress and strengthens team bonds. Find ways to blow off steam and have fun, whether it's going bowling, attending a sporting event, or good old karaoke—go do it. (And if you find a way to do all three in one night, you are winning.)

Leading a trial team is about fostering trust, collaboration, and a shared commitment to excellence—and that means embracing the value that everyone, especially our clients, bring to the team.

*This article does not necessarily reflect the opinion of Bloomberg Industry Group, Inc., the publisher of Bloomberg Law, Bloomberg Tax, and Bloomberg Government, or its owners.*

#### AUTHOR INFORMATION

**Michele L. Maryott** is a partner and co-chair of the Trials Practice Group at Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher.

Maryott was a recipient of Bloomberg Law's inaugural Unrivaled award, celebrating litigators who lead the legal industry in high-stakes trials and settlements on impactful matters for clients.