

The Law Firm Merger Diaries: Leadership Strategy After Day 1

By **Peter Michaud** (February 23, 2026)

What goes on behind the scenes before and after a law firm merger announcement? As the pace of mergers picks up, this Law360 Expert Analysis series explores strategies for effectively navigating various aspects of the process, with insights from practitioners at firms that have recently merged.

In this installment, Peter Michaud, chair at Ballard Spahr LLP, discusses how to lead a law firm after a merger, following the firm's 2025 combination with Lane Powell PC.

The term sheet is signed, positive media coverage is rolling in and integration is underway. As the leader of a newly combined law firm, your primary role now is to ensure that the combination lives up to its promise.

First and foremost, you gotta believe.

The confidence you convey in the combination as a win for clients and everyone at the firm will energize colleagues as they undertake the complex, nuanced and challenging process of melding two successful firms into a single enterprise that soars.



Peter Michaud

Law firm leaders have many responsibilities after a combination. Setting priorities is key. Here are some I think are particularly important:

- Form an integration A-Team.
- Communicate relentlessly, listen intently.
- Prioritize operations and technology early on.
- Focus on new offices, but make time for all offices.
- Celebrate successes and milestones.

Form an integration A-Team.

Integration is both big picture and nuts and bolts — and it is vitally important. As the leader of the firm, you are the ultimate decision-maker, but you must enlist and lead a team of trusted advisers and standout business professionals to implement the firm's integration strategy.

Invest this core, cross-functional team of top performers with responsibility for ensuring that incoming colleagues have everything they need to do their best work and build their practices from day one forward. At Ballard Spahr, this team oversaw a roster of designated "accountability leaders" responsible for specific areas of the integration, including one that leaders should not overlook: building a sense of community and engagement in a firm that, overnight, has grown dramatically.

Your core team should also be responsible for analyzing needs and available resources, and making recommendations. The chair makes the final call on which projects take priority.

Effective leadership entails a realistic assessment of how much change your organization can manage effectively and knowing where to draw the line.

Firm leaders must be attuned to how combination-related decisions affect resource allocation and decisive in deferring lower-priority projects that could detract from a robust launch or strain day-to-day operations.

Communicate, communicate, communicate.

Effective communication is the foundation of successful integration. The chair of the firm plays a pivotal role in sharing information firmwide and with specific groups within the firm through in-person meetings and events, virtual meetings, videos, and written communications.

Additionally, be a visible presence in a merger-centric portal on your firm's intranet, where information is accessible to lawyers and business professionals whenever they need it or at their convenience. Adding the leader's photo and a personal note of gratitude and encouragement is certain to spike engagement and buy-in — and further demonstrates your commitment.

In all communications, the way to inspire trust is by modeling an approach that is forthright — no sugarcoating — yet shows humanity and understanding. That means addressing concerns and uncertainties openly while expressing enthusiasm for the combination at every opportunity.

Combinations are stressful. Like passengers on a plane who look to the cabin crew when they're unsettled by choppy air, your lawyers and business professionals will take their cues from you. When tension threatens to swamp your team, be the calm and reassuring presence in the room.

Be a cheerleader. Maintain positivity. Show grace. Look for opportunities to give encouraging feedback.

One size does not fit all when it comes to communication. For example, new partners may need additional guidance when it comes time to prepare for such things as budget season, allocations, associate evaluations and the fourth-quarter collection campaign.

The way your firm handles these big, important processes may be daunting — especially as new colleagues adjust to a raft of changes. Send an email to your new partners as a follow-up to whatever general announcement goes out to all partners, offering additional insight and tips for navigating these unfamiliar waters.

Targeted communications are key when you are bringing together two firms with different ways of doing things.

Be visible and listen.

Visit your new offices and walk the halls. Get to know people at all levels. Reassure them by your presence that they've joined a firm that values people and relationships, a place where they can flourish.

When someone approaches you with a problem or suggestion, make a note of it and relay it to the person at the firm best suited to address it. In the first year after our combination, I

met regularly with our legacy Lane Powell partners.

I used these meetings to preview important things that were coming up, such as allocations, and then invited the partners to ask questions or raise issues on any topic. I made notes, then followed up with an email to the person at the firm most capable of addressing the issue, with a cc to the partner who brought it to my attention.

Make introductions.

As chair, you know your firm's practices and practice priorities, and you've spent more time than anyone getting to know the capabilities of the lawyers at the other firm. Thus, you are keenly attuned to lawyer and practice collaborations that are likely to bear fruit. Don't assume that lawyers who should meet each other will connect.

Make the introductions. Your involvement will lend credibility to the importance of the endeavor. Matchmaking is a time-consuming but worthwhile effort.

Prioritize operations and technology.

In the early days after a combination, a leader's most pressing priority is to see that lawyers and business professionals can serve their clients without interruption. That means setting a high bar for the people on your team responsible for operational and technology systems, including on-the-ground support for those who are new to the firm.

Request regular updates from integration team leaders and make sure they know to notify you immediately of operational issues that require your involvement. In certain situations, a lawyer may need to hear directly from the chair that their technology issue or operational problem is important and is being addressed.

Existing offices need love, too.

Combinations require a tremendous amount of time and energy on the part of the chair and may curtail your travel to existing offices. Office leaders will understand that you need to attend to integration efforts, but don't neglect existing offices. Check in with office heads, make plans to visit once the combination is humming, and, in the meantime, promptly address any needs they bring to your attention.

Have fun.

The combination is a good thing, right? So have fun with it. Lighthearted touches brighten the mood and make an impression. When the leader of the law firm gets involved, it sends the message that they care about creating an enjoyable professional environment for the firm's most important asset: its people.

At Ballard Spahr, as a way to build a sense of community, we had a firmwide scavenger hunt, complete with golden tickets and funky sunglasses — in keeping with our combination tagline, which morphed from "Two Firms. One Bright Future" precombination to "One Firm. One Bright Future" postcombination.

I agreed to serve as the face of the scavenger hunt to promote the event, and even allowed a comical doctoring of my photo.

Celebrate good times.

As the leader of the firm, take every opportunity to publicly highlight wins, success stories and milestones, and encourage others at the firm to do the same. Reiterate the benefits of the combination. Lead the way in making the excitement and success of your combination a consistent theme in press interviews, client meetings, firm events, and internal and external communications.

Our first year as a combined firm with Lane Powell was a resounding success, the result of hard work, extraordinary collaboration, and a genuine enthusiasm for the people and opportunities the combination brought to our firm and our clients. I could not be more proud to lead this firm and the exceptional people who contribute to its success.

Peter V. Michaud is the chair at Ballard Spahr LLP.

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