High Flyers
Developing the Next Generation of Leadership
By Morgan W. McCall, Jr.

Reviewed by Irene Taylor
Rating A - A must read.

I f you really want to be more successful and effective as a leader, this is one of the best books you will ever read on how to do so. It is as valuable for lawyers as leaders as it is for McCall’s business executive target audience. The book is grounded in extensive research through McCall’s work at Centre For Creative Leadership, one of the most highly respected organizations for the study and practice of senior business leadership, as well as his on-going work through the University of Southern California.

Leadership Is Evergreen
It never goes out of fashion and the skills of high achieving leaders are highly transferable. Lawyers will find they have much in common with McCall’s executive leaders; usually highly intelligent, with early and well-established patterns of achievements, possessing a number of key strengths and also one or more weaknesses that can and often do derail them.

Experience Is The Best Teacher!
Lawyers are notorious for their distaste for leadership development programs of all varieties, so much so that they are a visibly absent profession at most of these conferences and courses. The reputation of the legal profession is such that lawyers are the one group that most management / leadership consultants avoid marketing to.

The reader will find McCall’s approach to development refreshing. Not only does his research reveal that challenging stretch work assignments are the best teacher, he outlines the types of experiences that are most valuable. These include early work assignments upon joining a firm, start-up operations, opening new lines of business or practice turnarounds, and a whole variety of new/different projects or assignments. The experiences that change a leader most are “hairpin curves and stomach turning drops” that force them to look at themselves through a different lens. The recent Tory Haythe incident is an excellent example.

As painful and costly as the whole situation was, it was apparent to anyone who followed the story that the leaders within Torys approached it in a highly achievement-focused way which resulted in a speedy, decisive decision. It would also be apparent to those familiar with how such decisions are reached that the exercise no doubt strengthened the leadership at Torys for the long term. While no-one ever wishes such terrible situations to occur, often the greatest learning and greatest strength comes from such leadership actions in moments of truth. In terms of leadership analysis, the Torys’ story is analogous to the Tylenol incident where superior leadership was also displayed. As the reader may recall, Tylenol’s swift response to the tampering scare actually increased marketplace and employee confidence and respect.

There are many opportunities for leadership growth in today’s firms. Recent law firm mergers are but another example. Mergers typically fail due to human and cultural reasons. Mergers that succeed typically have strong leaders who engender a sense of shared vision, confidence and opportunity. Firms can increase their leadership competency by more consciously using these types of situations as coaching—learning situations that become part of their leadership folklore.

Derailment—Strengths Become Weaknesses
McCall’s work on derailment is one of the most valuable parts of this book. It seems that while most of us would certainly like to avoid the pain and embarrassment of derailing, too often we don’t see it coming. Chapter 2, The Derailment Conspiracy, is compelling, frighten-