

# Defining Our Vision and Values

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*Wiley Government Contracts*

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On this episode, Government Contracts practice chairs Paul Khoury and Scott McCaleb join host Craig Smith to discuss how the practice defines what it does, what it wants to be, and what it believes in. The trio cover why it was important for the practice to outline their values on paper, how it benefits attorney-client relationships, and how they implement it in day-to-day routines.

## Transcript

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Craig Smith

Well good morning, good afternoon, good evening wherever you're listening from. This is the Wiley Government Contracts Podcast. I am Craig Smith, a partner in the practice. With me today, it's a real treat - two lawyers who need no introduction because you probably already know who they are. Scott McCaleb and Paul Khoury, the co-chairs and stalwarts of our Government Contracts practice group. Scott and Paul, thanks so much for joining us.

Paul Khoury

Our pleasure.

Scott McCaleb

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## Practice Areas

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Government Contracts

You're welcome. That just means that we're old. [Laughter]

Craig Smith

Some of what we did last year I think is helpful because it's a matter of, both are defining what's important to you. You know, I want to do something new this year or in our case, we as a group spent time last year thinking about what really matters to us as a practice group. And it, you know, we took the time to collectively, through an iterative process, define what are our group's values and what's our vision for the group. That's something that our listeners might think "I've heard of law firms do that. I've heard as a whole, I've heard of companies do it." But a group within a firm, that's, that'd be something kind of new to me. Maybe we could talk about where did we get that started, and then get into what those values are.

Paul Khoury

Sure, I'm happy to take the lead on that to begin with. So, we have the good fortune of being a sponsor of the Association of Corporate Counsel (ACC). They have an academy for up-and-coming leaders, and we had the opportunity to be involved in some of their sessions, and one of the sessions was on leading with vision and values, and we had the opportunity with, you know, some in-house counsel that that we respect and work with regularly to have a dialogue about that. It occurred to me and Kara Sacilotto, who was also on that panel, you know, we clearly have values and they've been inoculated into us, and we clearly have visions as to what our practice should be, but we haven't put it down on paper. And we're not all, you know, preaching them on a regular basis. Why don't we do that? We should do that. And then getting more into it, started looking at virtually all of our significant clients have value statements and vision statements and, you know, there's a lot of overlap with them. I mean you're going to see in many of them, of course, integrity, and you're going to see for a lot of our clients hey, we want to be a valuable partner to our customer, we want to support the mission. And as a law firm and as a practice within a law firm, we have similar goals and visions and it occurred to us it made sense to write them down and make sure we're all on the same page. So I don't know, Scott, you want to jump in on that?

Scott McCaleb

Yeah well I think that's precisely right and we do have the benefit of having a wide group of clients who are real leaders in the government contracting field and virtually all of them, as you alluded, have you know either a mission statement or value or vision statement or some combination of all three. And as we, you know I think we took some inspiration as you say from ACC, some inspiration from our own clients and, as far as I know we're really the first practice group in the firm to really do this and I think you know what we wanted to do is identify and reduce to writing what's important to us as a group, who do we want to be as a government contracts practice, and how do we achieve, you know what we want to be and so that's where we started. You know we started with really kind of a vision. You know what was our vision, and we followed really the KISS principle. You know, let's keep it simple. And one of the things that we try and do is, you know as lawyers in the government contracting field, is keep things you know, short, understandable, and so that's what we did, and so we started with our vision and ended up you know talking about what that vision is and

then how do we, you know, what are the values that are going to allow us to implement that vision of what we think this practice is going to be.

Craig Smith

I think that's right, and our listeners at home don't have the sheets that are in front of us, so maybe we can share with them what vision statement came out of it. And I think one thing, Scott, you hit on is the simplicity means some things, not everything can fit in, because at some point it starts to become overstuffed, and I agree I think we really worked hard to hone in over a number of months on what's the final briefest, concisest explanation of who we are.

Scott McCaleb

Yeah, and that was important to us and so you know the process, it you know, it was a sausage making process like any other.

Paul Khoury

Yeah, it was.

Scott McCaleb

And it was and we really, we collected the views and values and visions of everyone in the group at all levels and then began to see patterns and ultimately through your good work, Craig, along with Kara and Eric Leonard and others, really were able to kind of synthesize this. So we started out you know with the vision, and the vision, you know, we're in a professional setting, we are professional, this is our profession, and so we set the vision and the vision that we ultimately agreed on is that we want to continue to set the bar for quality and effectiveness of government contracts practices. We want to be a leader, we want to be the leader in government contracts, and so that's the vision. And then, Paul, we, as you know, then we went to you know how do we do that? How do we get there? What are the values that we share as a group that will allow us to achieve that vision?

Paul Khoury

Before we get to the values, just to talking about the vision, so you know Scott and I, as you referred to have been here a long time. I started here in 1986 so I'm on my thirty-seventh year. Scott's I think 1997?

Scott McCaleb

Yeah.

Paul Khoury

So, on your twenty-sixth year. Um, and the leader of the practice at the time I started was Rand Allen, and he had a vision, and it was pretty clear, it wasn't written down, but it was pretty clear. He wanted to create one of the go-to contracts practices in the world. And that was his vision and he wanted to be the firm where you could tell the board, "Hey, we got Wiley on it," and they'd say, "Okay, good were fine." And to his credit, I think he accomplished that, and we are the beneficiaries to that. But so our vision had to be something different. You know your visions have to consistently be aspirational and going beyond that and that's how we came up with continuing to set the bar and it's a very dynamic field and you constantly, you can't be resting on your laurels, you've got to constantly be looking to continue to excel and innovate.

Scott McCaleb

And so in that spirit, you know, I think, Craig, as you know all too well as really the person who continued to shepherd this process along, keeping it simple, we really arrived at five core values and those values are excellence, they're candor, they're ethics and integrity, they're inclusivity, and collegiality. And we had, for each of those values, we had literally a one sentence explanation that really kind of synthesizes and simplifies what we mean and what we are trying to achieve in each of those. I think that you know the end result and the end product is one that I think that we're proud of and that we think is going to really serve as our north star as we move forward this year and into the decades ahead.

Paul Khoury

Yeah, one of the things that I remember from the panel we did that stuck with me is one of the benefits of writing it down is that when you face the next problem, it's easy to say oh well you know are we going to disclose X? Well you know, ethics and integrity, that's one of our values. We have to disclose X, you know? Hey there's some bad news we have to tell our client? Well of course you got to be candid with your client about those things. You know and so writing it down makes the decisions easier because we've already all agreed on what matters to us.

Craig Smith

One thing I thought, and we had a good question internally that I think prompted this discussion and came up toward the end of the process, was is there some order to them, and I think the answer was no, they're all important, and you know it's easy to fall back on, oh well ethics and integrity is most important, but I think as we thought through that more it was we can't fulfill ethics and integrity to the degree we need to if these other values aren't working. They work together as a team, and I thought that was something that really stood out to me and I'm so glad that in part of this iterative process that question came up at the end.

Paul Khoury

Yeah.

Scott McCaleb

Craig, it's such an important point and yeah each of the core values has an equal seat at the table and for the reasons that you suggest, so if you look for example at excellence, well you can't achieve excellence if you aren't responsive – and what we've said for candor, for example, is that we're responsive and transparent. That means we're responsive to each other, we're responsive to our clients, we're transparent with them. You can't achieve excellence without being responsive and being transparent. You can't achieve excellence without fulfilling our definition of ethics and integrity, which is we have an unyielding commitment to always do things the right way. And we face those issues every day you know, especially in the practices that we're involved in, that often where cases are being conducted under protective orders, there are oftentimes inadvertent disclosures that are innocently made disclosures, and how the recipient responds to the receipt of that you know, inadvertently disclosed information. We don't want, we want it to be a natural reaction that, of course, I better you know box this up and disclose what has been released to us inadvertently and you know.

Paul Khoury

Not take advantage of it.

Scott McCaleb

Not take advantage of it, and work with the person who disclosed it to try and you know minimize any harm in that.

Paul Khoury

I'm sorry. That doesn't mean that we're not vigorously representing our clients. It means we're doing it in an ethical fashion. And you know just to bounce off of some of that, you know, we obviously couldn't say everything we wanted to say in just the words, but collegiality – obviously we want our teams to work together well. But I think it goes beyond that, I want to be collegial to opposing counsel if I can, you know, we're going to vigorously defend and represent our client, but we're not going to pick unnecessary fights, and if we find areas of agreement, we're going to work on that. So each of these goes beyond you know a simple sentence, which is what we have there.

Craig Smith

It's funny you mentioned opposing counsel because when I talk to people about our work, I say we have this blessing of having a small community that we practice in, and so much of the nonsense you hear about in other lines of work, we just don't deal with it. And when I talk to people, I say our jobs are hard enough. I don't need to make it harder by being unreasonable to people. And I think that stands out and it's an expectation, if you're going to be in this practice you need to be a reasonable person to deal with.

Paul Khoury

Right and you know, so, if you look at the sentence we came up with for that, it's "We treat everyone with respect and dignity," and that includes opposing counsel.

Scott McCaleb

And once more, you can't achieve excellence without, we think that collegiality both within and without the firm in our group is critical to achieving excellence, as is inclusivity. We, you know, and the sentence we came up to describe that was that we build our team to leverage each member's individuality and perspective and unique contributions. We want diverse thoughts. We want our team, we are really blessed to have a team that comes from all different backgrounds and different experiences, life experiences, professional experiences, academic experiences, and we want everyone to feel that they can contribute and do contribute in each of their own unique ways and part and parcel of that of that inclusivity also is making sure that you know younger lawyers get great opportunities and provide opportunities so that they can begin to hone their skills and so as we you know, as we looked at the totality of the five core values – inclusivity, collegiality, ethics and integrity, candor, and excellence – we really feel really good about that, at least for us, those are core values that are going to hopefully allow us to realize our vision, the vision of continuing to set the bar for quality and effectiveness in government contracts.

Paul Khoury

So, kind of interesting, you know, obviously Scott and I, and you can tell from Scott talking about it how proud we are of these. And so I showed them to a pretty sophisticated client of ours, who you know does a lot of thinking in these regards, and I was kind of surprised by his initial reaction which was so I see these and they're all good, but if you ask me so which one of the top government contracts firms is this, I wouldn't be able to tell you. And I told him yeah, you're right. And I realized this is not a branding exercise, this is different from something the firm did when we you know went from Wiley Rein to Wiley and identified our core pillars and what the firm is all about. This is more codifying what really matters to us when we practice, and hopefully, it doesn't differentiate us from other great lawyers. Most great lawyers should be thinking about these! Now they may have others and or say them differently, or what have you, but so by definition this is not going to be a, oh that must be Wiley, kind of branding.

Scott McCaleb

Well there's that and you know, these are also intended, as the three of us know, these are intended to be, you know, pillars and a compass for us to follow you know throughout the year, and so one of the ways that you know we're rolling that out is through our vision and values moment, for example, at our biweekly group meetings. And you know we had a great example of that this morning where Tracye Howard talked about a case she had been involved in, and how counsel had reacted to a potential protective order violation, and how we reacted, and how we would have and should have reacted had we been on the other side of the issue. And so again, to your point Paul, it's not necessarily a branding exercise, it's not a branding exercise at all.

Paul Khoury

Right.

Scott McCaleb

It's really knowing who we are and trying to achieve our aspiration of being you know, a leader in the government contracting space and how we're going to get there.

Paul Khoury

And you know this this whole sort of vision and values moment, I had a client who I've really admired the ethics program they put together, and in every single internal meeting they have, they have what they call a compliance corner which is, you know, a couple minutes on a compliance issue. And so now and in all of our group meetings, we've got this this vision and values minute and, thanks to your leadership Craig, tasking different folks with you know, reporting on each of these and it keeps it front and center and again, you know, you have advised us that you've talked to people who said you know if it feels like you're doing it just a little too much, you're probably doing it just the right amount.

Craig Smith

If everyone's doing it, I think that's a good thing for the community as a whole, and ultimately it redounds to our clients' benefit if everyone's doing things the right way. I think it's something to look forward to as we continue to roll this out and find new ways to integrate it into our practice, and so Paul and Scott, I want to thank you again for the time, and I look forward to having you back on the program at some point in the future.

Paul Khoury

Our pleasure. Thank you.

Scott McCaleb

Thanks so much, Craig.