

Asking for the Business

By Tim W. Hrastar



You've spent weeks, months, and maybe years nurturing a prospective client—building rapport and a trusting relationship, but you still haven't gotten any business—maybe you didn't ask.

Patience and Persistence

First of all, keep in mind that it takes many contacts with a prospective client before any business comes your way. You don't take a prospect to lunch on a Tuesday and expect to get business on a Wednesday. Granted, sometimes it just falls into your lap; through a referral for example. Perhaps you have been highly recommended by a colleague and the prospect has an urgent need and wants you do their work based on that referral. Congratulations—just go with it. But if it's a piece of business you really want because it fits the profile of the kind of clientele you want to build, then you need to be ready for what may be a long romance. You have to have patience and persistence to develop a relationship of trust—to go from the introduction, to dating, and finally to the marriage.

Popping the Question

Many lawyers, and not just lawyers I might add, but many other professional service providers, sometimes forget to 'ask for the business.' They assume the prospect will automatically say let's work together, which does happen occasionally, but generally you have to ask.

Keep in mind that you are usually way ahead of the client in the selling process; after all you've been leading the process from the beginning so you think they are in the same place you are in. But they're not. When it comes time to make a commitment to do business with someone the question in their mind is, "what's it going to be like doing business with this person; will I like him, is he competent, can I trust him?"

You need to make sure to address these concerns, especially at the moment when the

prospect agrees to become a client. That's a very delicate stage in the relationship. Remember, at this point you are excited and in your mind are moving onto the next steps, while they aren't sure they made the right decision. Slow down! Be extra sensitive at this point and make sure you let them know they've made the right decision. You do this by setting the expectations of the relationship. Show them that you genuinely care for them and their needs, be a good listener, and ask them questions about how they envision the relationship—how often and in what way they want to communicate, and so on.

Many times people know they should ask, but are afraid of the answer they will get, which is NO. Remember no is never forever. It's just temporary. It's just no for that moment in time. Don't take it personally; they just may not be ready yet.

Questions to Use in Asking for the Business

Here's the scenario. You have been talking with a prospective client for a long time. You've had several meetings where you talked about various legal issues and their concerns, along with other rapport building topics. But you have the feeling you are stalled. Now is the time to check the temperature of the water and see if it's time for the both of you to take the plunge.

1. I would really like to work with you on this matter. What will it take to get started? [Alternate: What do we need to do to move forward?]
2. What else do you need to know from me before we get started?
3. Do you have any more questions I can answer on this issue before we start working on this? [Alternate: When would you like to start working on this?]
4. Based on our discussion it looks like



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we're in agreement as to which way to go. Are you ready to move forward?

5. You mentioned that time is of the essence. Based on that we need to get started right away; are you ready?
6. What would you like to do next?
7. What's our next step?

You'll notice that all of these questions are designed to evoke a specific response. If you don't ask, you may never know the answer. This is a 'soft-sell' approach. Many times lawyers are concerned about coming across as too

aggressive—too pushy. These questions don't do that. Try them at the appropriate time—and the appropriate time is usually sooner than you think it is. Good luck in asking for the business!

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