

Business Development Takes Patience, Persistence and a Plan

By Tim W. Hrastar



Patience, Persistence and a Plan

“Rome wasn’t built in a day,” and “It’s a marathon, not a sprint,” are two metaphors, although quite tired, that are accurate in describing the process of developing business for any law practice. It takes patience and persistence to make the initial contact and develop the relationship to where that person says; ‘I want to hire you.’

I have had some lawyers say to me, “Gee, I took this person to lunch once, why didn’t she give me any business?” One lunch meeting does not a client make. It may take several lunches, phone calls and emails, personal visits, sharing of information and advice, and other attention to get a piece of business. This process may take months and years to unfold, and even then it still may not happen. Don’t get discouraged—keep plugging away—that’s the patience and persistent part.

Then again, sometimes business just falls in your lap, through a referral for example. Take it and run with it and work to create a long term relationship with that new client. But alas, the rest of your business will come through having persistence of contact and the patience’s to nurture the relationship.

When I discuss this topic in workshops seasoned partners nod their head in understanding and agreement; while associates, think, “what did I get myself into; I just wanted to practice law, not be a salesperson.”

As every seasoned lawyer in a firm knows, if you don’t have an active plan for pursuing additional business with current clients, and new business with new clients, you’re just not going to have much business at all. The days of just doing good work—and the business will come to you, actually never was. In the days before formalized law firm marketing, lawyers who had a large and active client base made positive efforts to build it, even if they made it seem easy to others. They actually performed all the

rainmaking tasks that successful lawyers use today to market themselves and their firm. After all, firms weren’t built without the efforts of rainmakers—somebody had to bring in the business.

Today, however, the competition is fiercer than it’s ever been. There are more lawyers chasing fewer clients; so a more active role needs to be played by all lawyers who want to build their business. But, that doesn’t mean you have to appear overly aggressive, and certainly not obnoxious, to grow your business. A plan that you methodically and doggedly work will make you a successful business developer.

Go After the Right Business

You need to have an organized plan that tells you first, what kind of practice you want to pursue. Be specific in outlining your client profile, after all you don’t want everybody’s business. You want business that you enjoy working on because of its inherent challenges, it matches the kind of skills you have, and hopefully you enjoy doing it because you like the people who work in that particular area—and oh yes, they have a need for the services you provide.

Let’s say, for example, your practice area is in a healthcare law where you deal with hospitals and medical technology companies of a certain dollar and employee size; that have specific concerns in technology. Once you have identified your client profile you need to be active in the networking circles your clients and potential clients hang out in. Join their trade and professional associations and become active—get on committees and serve.

You also need to educate your colleagues on what you do and the kind of business you are pursuing. If you don’t let the market know you’re out there, and what your worth is; the market won’t even think about you, let alone value what you do. So get the word out. Let your



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colleagues, and especially your clients and potential clients, know what value you bring to the party. You can demonstrate your confidence, and show your ability, by how well you respond to their questions and their general needs and wants.

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Become a Subject Expert

Become a subject expert in your field—be the go to person for solving problems and pursuing opportunities for your clients. Two very powerful ways to do this is to develop and present seminar topics that your clients and potential clients can learn from. In conjunction with speaking engagements write articles that will appear in their publications, and include the article reprints in your seminar handout materials.

Stay in Touch

You have to talk with clients on a regular basis, even if it's just a quick phone call or email to let them know you are thinking about them and you care for them. Provide them with helpful information that will help solve a problem or take advantage of an opportunity to enhance their business. This is free advice by the way—the meter isn't running at this point. You have to give something of value before you can get something in return. Once you do this the law of reciprocity kicks in and you start getting hired.

Have a schedule where you call or email clients and prospects on a regular basis—put it in your calendar, so you don't forget. Make a breakfast or lunch appointment to get together and catch up with them. Otherwise it's out of sight—out of mind.

You have to include all this activity into your daily routine—you have to be consistent, persistent, and patient in order to be successful at business development. Now pick up the phone and call a client you haven't spoken to in awhile.



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