

Try On a New Attitude

Does the Thought of Marketing Make You Anxious? Focus on the Process, Not the Results.

Want to make an attorney nervous? Use these magic words in their job description: *sales and marketing*. If you're like most attorneys, you didn't spend your days and nights studying cases and memorizing judicial decisions to become a salesperson. You wanted to help others, pursue intellectual challenges, and build a great reputation in a profession that you're passionate about—all commendable career objectives.

But the truth is, whether you're presenting your case to a jury or meeting with potential new clients, your success in these endeavors is influenced by your ability to sell yourself, your profession, and your firm. Put aside for a moment the seemingly almighty billable hour. Of course the billable hour matters. But when it comes time for partnership review, you will be evaluated on your ability to bring in new business and generate increased revenue. In the end, it's all about sales and marketing!

So how can you learn to embrace business development techniques and supercharge your career? Like developing an exercise routine to get in shape, time and discipline are essential. And several simple and rewarding techniques can make it fun. But first, you need to change your attitude about the sales and marketing process.

Here are 10 principles you can exercise today to dispel any nervousness or anxiety you may feel about sales and marketing:

1. Change your definition of marketing. Too many attorneys think that *marketing* and *rainmaking* are synonymous. They're not. Rainmaking is an outcome; marketing is a process. Because rainmaking focuses on and implies an outcome, many lawyers find it intimidating.

Marketing, on the other hand, is the process of developing contacts, building a reputation and creating positive relationships. It requires small steps, not giant leaps—and it doesn't necessarily require an outcome. Focus on the process and the rainmaking will take care of itself.

2. View marketing as a way to be helpful to others. Many attorneys feel uncomfortable using their relationships to create business. On the other hand, they feel perfectly comfortable helping other people. Try to see business development as a way for you to be useful to the people in your network. For example, take a look at your current clients. Try to learn as much as you can about their businesses. Help them identify their goals and objectives and uncover new and creative ways to help your clients achieve them.

Focus on being helpful to your existing clients. They're your best source of generating new business opportunities for you and your firm. No amount of advertising can equal a word-of-mouth recommendation from a satisfied existing client!

3. Don't think that business development means hitting up your friends and family for business. The truth is, your family members and close friends are often the least likely people to give you business. Also, most business opportunities are not worth the potential damage if a deal with a family member or a close friend goes sour.

Keep it simple. Make sure your family and close friends know what you do so they can refer others to you. But don't actively pursue them for business. The old adage rings true for most of us: Business and personal rarely mix well.

4. Look for user-friendly reasons to market. There are many reasons to use marketing skills, apart from pursuing new business. For example, some attorneys use their marketing skills to expand their network of contacts or to obtain more interesting work. Others want to develop closer and more fulfilling relationships with both clients and colleagues. Still others want more independence and autonomy. Find a reason that ignites your passion and you'll find motivation for developing your marketing skills.

5. View the marketing process as an investment in your future. Even if your firm rewards only the billable hour, your

ultimate future at the firm and the career path you develop will depend largely on your marketing skills. I cannot count the number of excellent, hard-working attorneys I know who have been denied partnership, despite high billables, due to the perception that they were not going to generate new business opportunities. Others failed to internally market themselves so that those involved in partnership decisions knew of and recognized their accomplishments. Don't let this happen to you!

Developing marketing skills is not rocket science. It's a simple process that you can master and modify to fit your individual style. Recognize this early in your career and invest the time to develop the skills and earn the success stories that you need to advance your career.

6. Think long term. Act now. A *sales cycle* is the length of time it takes from your first contact with a potential client to closing the sale. An attorney's sales cycle might run anywhere from six months to six years. This means, if you're not marketing today, you won't have business down the road. Your future success depends on your current activity.

7. Don't use lack of time as a reason not to market. Remember that this is like an exercise program. You must schedule time to market in order to be successful. Better yet, follow this simple, time-saving secret: Continue with your current practices, but think *marketing*. In other words, always be prepared to talk about what you do and take the initiative to make contact with others during your daily routine. Suddenly, you'll notice that many opportunities present themselves each day—and you'll be prepared to act on them.

I found one of my biggest clients on the tennis court. She was my opponent in a tournament. After our match, I learned that she was a partner in a major national law firm that was a good candidate for my company's training services. Where will you find your next client? Maybe it's the person at the daycare center waiting, like you, for her child. Maybe it's the person sitting next to you on the plane. You never know. But each time you try to find out, you save time, build your marketing and interactive skills, and increase your business opportunities.

8. Enlist marketing allies. When it comes to marketing, you don't have to go it alone. Introduce other members of your firm to the clients you work with. Make use of the resources available to you in your firm's marketing department. Take others with

you to networking events and see who can collect the most business cards. Marketing is more effective and infinitely more enjoyable if you involve other people in the process.

9. Change your definition of failure. The practice of law is a win-lose event. Not so with marketing. Marketing is more like an ongoing numbers game. To win one new client, most attorneys need to have at least 10 to 15 prospective clients in the pipeline. This means that every potential client you fail to win brings you that much closer to the one you *will* win.

Don't be discouraged by rejection! Remember your job interview process? Not every firm you interviewed with was the right fit. By the same token, not every potential client is the right client fit for your firm. You want clients who respect your advice and have a high regard for your firm, and that's not the case with every client you approach. Once you recognize this fact and change your mind-set, you will see the success—not the failures—in your marketing efforts.

10. Make the commitment. Every attorney I know (myself included) worked diligently through law school. When they left law school, many of them joined firms where they worked even harder to learn how to be an effective practicing attorney. However, few attorneys have taken the time to educate themselves about the art of business development. Don't make that mistake. Recognize the importance of developing your own set of marketing skills and make the commitment to continue to develop them.

To get started, attend a local Legal Marketing Association meeting. You can find out about programs by visiting www.midatlanticlma.com. Read *Selling the Invisible* by Harry Beckwith (Warner Books 1997). It's a great book and an easy read. Attend a marketing training program offered by your firm. Request marketing training if your firm doesn't provide it. As with so many other commitments, the most important step is the first one. Then you're on your way to charting your own path to success.

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