



## How to Get Your Attorneys to Build Client Relationships

*By Eva Wisnik, Contributing Editor*

**M**ost attorneys are much more comfortable spending time mastering legal knowledge and acquiring legal skills than they are developing and nurturing professional relationships. An understanding Marketing Director can make this transition into Networking a positive experience. Having worked with more than 1,600 attorneys over the past nine years, I now comprehend the reasons why most attorneys are so uncomfortable building and nurturing professional relationships. Primarily, because they have never been taught these skills and because 60% of them are introverts (according to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator as opposed to 75% of the population at large which is extroverted). Being introverted can make it difficult for lawyers to initiate relationships. You, as the Marketing Director, can help attorneys overcome their fear and resistance to marketing if you encompass these realities into your marketing training programs.

### *How to Convince Your lawyers that Networking is NOT a Waste of their Time*

Networking, defined as building and nurturing professional relationships when you do not need them, so they are there for you when you do need them, is one of the keys to Rainmaking. Therefore, lawyers need to invest time in meeting professionals, learning about their business needs, and maintaining these relationships early on in

their legal careers. Young attorneys, as well as those practicing for many years, need to be convinced that these professional relationships are critical to their long-term success, because other people are the main source of information and resources that they will need to develop clients. After many years of school, the concept that PEOPLE could be a valuable source of information is not intuitive. For example, in law school, success was achieved with knowledge found in books, rather than from collaborations with classmates. You need to convince your lawyers that once they have mastered the skills and knowledge to be competent attorneys, their professional relationships will be the critical piece that will lead to client business and long-term career success. The best way to convince your attorneys, is by providing them with evidence that demonstrates how the Rainmakers in your organization have strong professional relationships, in addition to legal expertise.

### *What to Teach Your Attorneys About Successful Networking*

Most Attorney's expertise does not include the steps for establishing and maintaining professional relationships. Here are some specific actions your attorneys can take that will result in client development over time.

#### **1-Have them set specific networking goals.**

They should identify the professionals they want to meet, plan on how they will meet them and set a time-table by which they will achieve these goals. After analyzing the profile of

a typical client, good business referral and media contact, your attorneys will be clearer as to who they need to meet. For example, before they attend an industry association meeting where there are many prospective clients, they should review the attendee list (maybe even request it from the conference committee beforehand), and identify specific contacts they would like to make during the course of the meeting. This kind of planning is crucial. If your attorneys set specific goals, they are much more likely to achieve them.

## **2-Have them practice small talk.**

Firms have actually hired me to train their attorneys in what to say in "networking situations." Since most attorneys are introverts, talking to "strangers" when they are not in an expert role, is particularly difficult. My suggestion is to prepare at least three conversation starters before they attend a networking event. These "ice-breakers" can include comments on current news and business events. I encourage attorneys to be creative and guard against discussing trivial matters such as weather—it is hard to develop a meaningful dialogue when substance is lacking and you have no sincere interest in the topic. Train your attorneys to at least glance at key publications such as Crain's New York Business, The Wall Street Journal and BusinessWeek on a regular basis. You may even want to send them articles that they should be reading. This information will provide them with good leads for initiating networking conversations. But the most important thing to teach them, is that they need to focus on understanding the contacts' needs as soon as the initial conversation has begun. Once they learn to listen actively and understand what a prospective client's needs are, the door is opened for a substantive professional relationship.

## **3-Teach them to follow up within 48 hours with all new contacts.**

This is probably the place where attorneys need the most help—learning how to follow-up with new contacts and doing so immediately. You can make it easier for your attorneys to follow-up, by first, reminding them that new contacts

will form their opinion of them based upon their initial follow-through, or lack thereof. Second, you need to teach them what they need to do and third, you need to give them the tools so they can do so within 48 hours. Specifically, you may want to give them samples of the follow-up notes so they can have a starting place in knowing what to write to prospective clients that they have met. You may also want to provide them with personalized note cards and Firm information such as firm brochures and practice group pieces so that they have the tools they need to follow-up quickly.

## **4-Train them to take one action a day to initiate and maintain networking relationships.**

Get them in the habit of calling, meeting with or writing to one professional contact each day. By constantly establishing new professional relationships and nurturing existing ones, they will be in the stream of information, opportunities and resources. Developing this "one action a day" habit, early in attorney's careers will result in excellent client relationships in the long-term. Remind them that dropping a note, e-mail or calling a contact takes no more than 5 minutes! A five minute a day investment, will result in strong professional relationships and clients in a short period of time.

Your role as the Marketing Director is a challenging one. If you provide your lawyers with evidence that strategic networking does result in client relationships, action steps for developing and nurturing these relationships, and the tools for taking action, you will definitely be on your way to getting your attorneys to build better client relationships. If you need some help from the outside, consultants can offer objective assistance.

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