

Practical Success

Cordell M. Parvin

The Tipping Point For Lawyers

A couple of years ago, I enjoyed reading Malcom Gladwell's book, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. He is also the author of *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*, and *Outliers: The Story of Success*. I recommend all three books.

There are three main points in *The Tipping Point*. The first is the "law of the few." The second is "the stickiness factor." The third is "the power of context." In this column, I will explain how these points apply to lawyers and client development.

What is "the law of the few"? Your success in client development will be more likely if you know what will work best for you. Gladwell identifies three types of people: connectors, mavens, and salesmen:

- Connectors know lots of people. You know the type. No one is a stranger to them. Connectors are important not just because of the number of people they know, but also the kinds of people they know. They know people in different worlds. Connectors are masters of "weak tie re-

lationships," meaning many relationships that are not deep ones. Connectors are important because they spread the word to a wide group of people with whom they have weak tie relationships;

- A maven is someone who accumulates knowledge. They do the research most of us don't want to do and they find joy in passing along what they learn. If you have written an article about an important topic, a maven is the type most likely to find it;
- Salesmen are charismatic people who can persuade others even when the others are not convinced of what they are hearing. They can sell anything. Based on two studies, Gladwell notes that little things can be as important as big things. He also notes that non-verbal clues are as important — or more important — than verbal clues.

Finally, Gladwell suggests that persuasion works in ways we do not fully appreciate. It is not always the obvious eloquence; it can be way more subtle. Great salesmen connect with their clients in a vari-



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ety of non-verbal ways including non-verbal enthusiasm, confidence, and emotional expressiveness.

Gladwell notes that charisma can be measured and refers to the Affective Communications Test created by Howard Friedman, a psychologist at the University of California at Riverside. Friedman reports that the test identifies those who “are generally popular (even if they are shy) and influential, because of their ability to transmit emotions through nonverbal cues.”

What is “the stickiness factor”? This is the message that will be delivered by the connectors, mavens, and salesmen. In the context of your client development, the message must address problems, opportunities, internal changes or external changes your clients and potential clients are encountering. Otherwise, your clients and potential clients simply will not care.

What is the “power of context”? Gladwell gives as an example the book, *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* by Rebecca Wells. When the book first came out, sales were relatively slow. A year later the book came out in paperback and sales began to pick up. Women showed up for book signings in groups and they would have Rebecca Wells sign multiple books. Wells began to see mothers and daughters coming in together. Later, national media attention, articles in magazines, and television appearances vaulted Rebecca Wells to a star status. The power of context here is the role that groups play.

What does “the power of context” have to do with client development? In a difficult economy, when clients are searching for capital and markets, writing or speaking to clients about compliance issues may not resonate with them.

I read a very interesting Washington Post article that addressed the law of context. The Washington Post had internationally acclaimed Violinist Joshua Bell play at a Washington Metro stop while dressed in jeans, a long-sleeve tee shirt, and baseball cap. The test was whether in an incongruous context, ordinary people would recognize his genius. Interestingly, in the 45 minutes Bell played only seven people stopped to listen for at least a minute. Twenty seven gave money totaling \$32. The Post noted that in a music hall, Bell earns \$1000 a minute. I gather from reading the article that we are so busy and in our own world that we don’t take time to listen to one of the world’s greatest musicians. So, what can you learn from *The Tipping Point* and how can you use it to develop more business?

You must communicate an idea that “sticks,” by providing a solution to our potential clients’ problems, opportunities, internal changes, or external changes.

To get the idea out there, you need to have it where mavens will find it and we need to get it in the hands of connectors who will spread it. Lawyers can do this by writing and getting articles published, putting the articles on their website bios, by blogging, and by speaking to industry-based trade associations. Association executives are mavens for their members. They will spread good content you create that is valuable to their members.

Next, look for opportunities to speak to groups of potential clients and when you do, connect with them in a non-verbal emotional way. Finally, remember there must be a context for what you are trying to communicate that makes it important to those hearing or reading your message.

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