

Practical Success

Cordell M. Parvin

Answering Questions On Client Development/Marketing

I frequently receive questions on client development and marketing. In my column this month, I will share with you some of those questions and my thoughts. If you have a question you want me to answer in this column, send it to me. My goal is to write on subjects that interest you.

Question: I thought it is most important to do quality work. Is that true?

Answer: Clearly you must do quality work or nothing else you do will matter. Most of the work you do as a lawyer receives virtually no publicity, so you have to do more.

Question: If doing high quality work is not enough, what else do I need to do?

Answer: I think there are four main ways lawyers get business. First, some lawyers are the very best in their field. If you were thought to be the best civil trial lawyer, or corporate M&A lawyer, or labor and employment lawyer in your city or your state, you will be at the top of the list for the “bet the company” cases and transactions. It is unlikely you would need to do very much marketing or client development. Second, you could be

fortunate enough to represent a company that gets sued a lot, if you are a litigator, or does lots of deals, if you are a corporate lawyer. That works well until your client is acquired by another company or your contact retires. The third way is to find a niche and become known for your expertise in it. The fourth way is to become very active in the bar or the community, so that everyone in your target market knows who you are and values you.

Client development involves becoming visible and credible to potential client by building your reputation and involves building relationships. I believe

clients still generally hire lawyers rather than hiring law firms. I also believe that in most instances your reputation gets you considered while your ability to connect with the client representative and build their trust and confidence in you gets you hired.

The first thing you need to do to expand your client base is to have a plan with goals, an understanding of why the goals are important to you, and a list of activities that are

necessary to achieve your goals. Any marketing or client development activities must be driven by appropriate clients and potential clients, understanding their business drivers and being able to offer solutions to their problems.

Question: I have very limited time. What is the most important thing I can do?



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Answer: I am frequently asked by young lawyers what to do with their limited time. There is no one answer that applies to everyone. If you want to become visible and credible to your target market, you should write articles for industry publications, or blog for industry readers. If you want to become active in the community, pick one group that would enable you to interact with people in your target market and for which you can eventually assume a leadership role. If you have a stable of clients, spend time with the clients you already have.

Question: Does a company executive care about getting a business card from a young lawyer?

Answer: To be candid, the executive may not care about getting your card. Yet, you should want to get her card. You can gain a great deal from asking good questions and learning about the executive and her company and finding a way to follow up by “giving” something of value to the executive.

A few years ago, a young associate in my old firm went to a big social event where she met a gentleman in his sixties who was a leader in the industry. He was from Germany originally, but has lived in the United States for 30 years. The female associate spent a year in high school and a year in college in Germany. When she got back from the event she asked what she could do that would advance the ball. It turned out that a photographer had taken a photo of the two of them and a few other people. I suggested that she get a copy of the photo and send it with a handwritten note in German. I told her she could conclude by simply saying something about the work she is doing in the industry and how much she has enjoyed working with companies in

the industry. She did it and she actually received a call from him thanking her for the card. Even if she never gets any work directly from this gentleman, I am confident he will not forget her.

Question: I do not enjoy writing or speaking in front of groups, but I am active in my community. Will my community service provide me with an opportunity to get business?

Answer: I personally have never gotten any business from my involvement in my church or community, but one of my former partners built his career on his involvement in the community. He is a little older than I am and he first became active 30 years ago in a Los Angeles child care center for kids unable to cope with their family environments. He actually made friends and picked up some business from others helping at the center. As his civic activities increased, he found clients recommending him to other clients, who said proudly that he was not only a good lawyer, but also a good person. Only years later did he realize that working with kids who needed a role model gave him a life purpose and took him away from the stresses of his work life.

Question: What final thoughts do you have on client development?

Answer: More than anything else, it is important to make client development a habit-forming activity. Unless I was in a trial or getting ready for a trial, I always tried to do something to reach out to clients and potential clients each and every day.

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