Practical Success

Cordell M. Parvin

Five Practical Tips for Making the Sale

Recently I have been coaching and blogging on how to ask for business and close the sale. In an increasingly competitive legal environment it is more vital than ever that you become efficient and effective at client development. The first step is to increase your credibility and visibility; the final step is to convert that credibility and visibility into relationships that lead to you getting hired.

The lawyers I coach are often able to build their profile and relationships but find it difficult to convert their visibility to business. In this column, I hope to share with you tips that will help you. Here are five tips:

Tip 1: Ask yourself why you are uncomfortable asking for business.

Your answer is your first clue. Likely it is because you do not want to come across like the people who have tried to sell you something. That is a good reason to be uncomfortable. Keep in mind, clients do not want to hire lawyers who are "needy" or "greedy."

If you want to get more comfortable, think about salesmen and women with whom you wanted to do business. How were they different? I suspect you felt like they were trying to help you rather than trying to sell you.

Tip 2: Put yourself in position to have potential clients seek your help so you never need to ask for business.

How can you position yourself to have potential clients seek your help? You need to be perceived as the "go-to" lawyer in the area for which the potential clients are seeking help.

There are a variety of ways to become a go-to lawyer. You can work to become the best in your field of law. That takes time and some good fortune. The broader your practice area, the more challenging it is to become the go-to lawyer.

If you identify an industry-based practice, then you can focus on knowing more about your potential clients' industry than any other lawyer. When you have an industry-based practice, you can read

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what you clients read, and hopefully write for those publications. You can go to industry events, and hopefully speak at those events.

Tip 3: Find ways to add value.

Find ways to add value to your potential client prior to getting any legal work. When you add value with no expectation of anything in return, good things generally follow.

Identify a problem, opportunity, or change (before your potential clients know they have one), offer a solution, and give it away. If you are perceived as the go-to lawyer, clients will find you

Tip 4: Focus on charisma and likability.

What is charisma? Recently, a lawyer I coach told me she doubted she could ever be a rainmaker. I asked why she felt that way. She replied: "I am not an extrovert. I am rarely the life of the party. I don't enjoy going to networking events and I do not have charisma."

Several years ago I read Tony Alessandra's book: *Charisma: Seven Keys to Developing Magnetism That Leads to Success.* I like his definition of charisma: "Charisma is the ability to influence others positively by connecting with them physically, emotionally and intellectually."

You don't have to be extroverted to connect with others. Be confident and genuine. If you believe in yourself you will show strength, and if you genuinely care about your clients your warmth will come through in your facial expressions and body language.

Tip 5: Learn to ask better questions.

Last year I read *Power Questions* by Andrew Sobel and Jerold Panas. In the very first chapter the authors asked a CEO, "What most impresses you when you meet someone who is trying to win your business? The CEO's answer is very important: "I can always tell how experienced and insightful a prospective consultant, banker or lawyer is by the quality of their questions and how intently they listen. That's how simple it is."

Even though the CEO says it is simple, most lawyers I know are not very good at asking questions and instead rely on talking too much about themselves and their firms. If you want to get more business, work on your listening skills. Learn about the client and its business. Ask questions rather than making statements and actually listen to the answers. Don't ask for business. Instead earn the business.

If you want to get better at asking questions, I recommend *Power Questions* and I also recommend *SPIN Selling* by Neil Rackham. SPIN stands for:

1. Situation (questions)
2. Problem (questions)
3. Implication (questions)
4. Need-payoff (questions)

Focus on Client Service.

Incredibly, based on the surveys of corporate counsel, very few firms are providing the level of service expected, much less that level plus one. What an opportunity for a thoughtful and resourceful firm or practice group.

Law firm clients want both general things and more specific things. The general things are really pretty simple. Clients want their outside counsel to understand both the company and its industry. Clients want their law firms to be responsive, as defined by the client, and they want their lawyers to be innovative in ways that add value and/or reduce costs. Finally, clients want to know their outside counsel, trust them, and have a comfort level with them.

To learn the more specific things law firms and practice groups need to ask and need to get feedback, our construction group interviewed clients and determined what service was important to them. Then we created a Client Service Policy. It was invaluable in getting feedback and we were able to use it as a marketing tool for potential new clients.

Law firms and practice groups get to choose the level of service they will offer their clients. If law firms and practice groups decide what they want to become and define service from their client's perspective, then they should be able to execute in a way that exceeds expectations.