

Are the firm's partners selling at the right level?

By [Jim Cranston](#) on November 15, 2012

I'm often amazed at how many attorneys believe that they are making great strides in selling their services. . .to someone who may have no authority to buy! Ever wonder why partners' business development phone calls go unreturned? Perhaps they are dealing with someone at the wrong level. Or worse, someone who has no responsibility in the area about which they are inquiring.

To avoid this trap, encourage firm members to try one or more of the following approaches during their next conversation with an existing or prospective client:

1. ***Inquire about the decision making process*** – Create a hypothetical situation or simply ask how the selection process works for hiring outside counsel (on this or prior matters). If their contact lacks the hierarchical power to hire them or the firm, this will surely reveal it!
2. ***Ask if someone else needs to be involved in the decision*** – Our clients have used this many times with great success. This question elicits a few possible responses . . . and emotions. Either an energetic "I'm the decision maker" with a hint of ego attached or a caveat with a hesitation like "well, it depends". Both responses illuminate the answer!
3. ***Inquire about his/her buying history*** – The best indicator of the future is to look at the past. A question like "how many matters did you send to outside counsel last month/year?" will indicate if partners are selling at the proper level to the organization(s).