

Lack of Business Development Support May Be Just What You Need

By [LawVision](#) on June 10, 2016

I recently attended the [Legal Sales and Service Organization's Raindance Conference](#) in Chicago, which, by the way, I highly recommend. The keynote speaker, [Jeff Kaplan, PhD](#) of the J. Alan Group, spoke about a growing trend in sales: the movement away from more transaction-based selling toward more relationship-based selling. This is not a new topic, to be sure, but he was a dynamic speaker, and his examples and research resonated with me and made me reflect.

We often think of lawyers as being at a disadvantage because most don't have sales support, account managers, or salespeople to act on their behalves. But after hearing Dr. Kaplan, I wonder if this is truly a disadvantage or a blessing in disguise. In some ways, by not having all that "support," lawyers can approach business development in its purest form by developing deeper relationships.

Consider a corporate sales and marketing organization today. It will employ a massive team to support onboarding new customers: marketing staff for awareness, business developers to identify and create partnerships, channel directors to build strategic partnerships with synergistic players in the market, technical sales support, in-house sales support both for inbound calls and outbound calls, and account managers to take care of clients once relationships are established.

With so much of the sales function divided and delegated, it's no wonder the sales executive enters the sale in a transactional mode. After all, his or her role has been relegated to only that portion that drives revenue; the relationship-building and relationship-maintaining functions have been formally handed off to people with other titles.

Dr. Kaplan gave an example to draw a distinction between transactional and more meaningful relationships. He described someone at home taking out the trash and then coming in and demanding a hug and a kiss for his efforts. Of course, life doesn't work that way in our meaningful relationships. They aren't transactional like business relationships tend to be; we don't immediately demand love for our efforts. Instead, we offer it unconditionally because we value the relationship. Business developer lawyers, in some sense, are in a better position to offer that "love" than their sales-executive counterparts because, to a large degree, they own the whole sales cycle; from intake to point of sale to account management, they own the relationships.

[Sheila Ardalan](#) from Freeman, Freeman & Smiley in Los Angeles gave an inspiring Q&A presentation at the conference to drive this point home. As a non-lawyer, Ardalan had to go out with little internal support and build a book of business herself. She built long-lasting, genuine, authentic relationships on behalf of her firm and now carries a several-million-dollar book of business as a result.

So the next time you or a lawyer you know is pining for more support, consider that being saddled with doing it all yourself may just be the blessing in disguise you need to build long-lasting, relationships that turn you into the trusted advisor you want to be.