

Law Firm Business Development: Become Invaluable

By [Silvia L. Coulter](#) on February 1, 2019

Three discussions over the last two weeks have reminded me about the importance of making yourself known and invaluable. The first was a conversation with a client during a client interview. The client said, “You know, my allegiance is to my internal client. And, while our outside counsel are very helpful at times, they are not as valuable as my internal relationships who can make me look good, help me with the resources I need to do my job, or make my life easier day to day.” To which I responded: “How could outside counsel help you with these issues?” The answer.....don’t be too surprised.....was “they need to learn about our business, anticipate our legal needs relative to the business goals, and understand the implications on our business the legal issue brings. This requires communication from the top down at a firm so partners understand what ‘business understanding’ actually means. And actually the firm’s sales professional does this better than any partner I’ve dealt with.” The solution is simple: stay connected to your client, build the relationship outside of the legal work and become invaluable by out-servicing the competition.

The second was during a discussion with a managing partner and COO. Their comment to me about their CMO, “No we have not replaced him yet, and you must admit, Silvia, that unlike a CIO, HR, or CFO, all of which are absolutely critical positions, a CMO is important but not critical.” Similar sentiments were echoed recently on a webinar held by one of the top three business resource providers in the industry. The gap seems to still exist between the CMO and senior firm leadership and key constituents. The same solution as above may apply: understand their business and business challenges within and outside of the firm and discuss how the marketing team may add value.

Last, discussions with partners over a broad number of firms who are disenchanted with needing to bill a high amount of hours, manage a \$2 million sales quota, and contribute to the firm’s operations. What do they do? Look for in house jobs where they feel more appreciated, thus negatively (for the most part) impacting the firm and potentially its client retention. The partners don’t view the firm as seeing them as valuable to the organization.

How can we change these perceptions?

With the exception of clients, this is about internal communication. Communication is key. Pick up the phone, activate Skype, send an email and follow up with a call—whatever it takes, just communicate. Become invaluable so you are seen as a needed resource whether the “you” is the firm to its talent or a CMO to the firm, or partners to their clients. People walk when they don’t feel valued or don’t think you are valuable enough.

For CMOs and other C-level individuals, go meet with key stakeholders, not just the management team. Call office heads to see how they are doing, meet with practice chairs to learn about their challenges and how the team may support them.

I know it seems simple and to some extent it is. Try and develop a strategy for communicating within the firm. For leaders, let the lawyers know they are valued and valuable to the firm. That’s what good and great leaders do. Retain talent.

For clients? At the risk of sounding like a broken record, just call them or visit them to thank them for business and learn more about their growth strategy and their business challenges. It will become apparent through these conversations how you and the firm may add value to them in the future.

Communication is key. Become invaluable to your firm, to your clients and to your talent.