

Law Firm Business Development: Building a Sales Team

By [Silvia L. Coulter](#) on September 2, 2020

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Time to take some pressure off the partners. Law firms are woefully behind every other professional services business when it comes to hiring sales professionals. A trained sales professional with a successful sales background will help any firm drive more revenue, capture more client share of wallet, and relieve the pressure the legal professionals face when it comes to developing business. With some exceptions, lawyers hate or at least dislike selling. And, they are generally not as good at it as a sales professional with a successful track record. Some firms are realizing the enormous benefits of hiring salespeople and building a sales team. While there may be some initial backlash against management for heading in this direction, strong sales professionals can quickly change partner thinking. Yes, I'm talking about hiring externally-focused, client-facing sales professionals. The benefits are significant and those partners who work with seasoned sales pros realize quickly that it makes good sense to have a team to obtain new business that includes the legal pros who can talk substantive law and the sales pro who knows exactly when to move the conversation and the sales process along and close business.

Recently the head of litigation of a global giant said, "Why would we hire someone like that who could turn around and walk out the door with our firm's client contacts and go across the street and do the same thing?" Well, this is what we expect of laterals when we hire them, isn't it? To bring their clients with them. A seasoned sales person may have many industry contacts and can do just that—bring their contacts to the firm and make introductions.

In the same meeting, another dept chair of a 700-lawyer firm stated, "when we first brought Philip in most of our partners were aghast that we had hired a sales professional. Then all of a sudden everyone wanted a piece of him and one person wasn't enough. It's amazing how well someone like him works with our partners and how we've increased our odds of winning business by combining his talent with our lawyers' talent. We now can't imagine not having sales people at the firm."

Want to know how to take your key client teams to another level and really create strategic accounts? Get the help of a sales person who is responsible for client growth. Want to win more opportunities when competing against another firm? Hire a sales professional.

The reporting structure can be tricky. Most strong sales professionals would never dream of reporting to a marketing professional. A strong marketing person with excellent management/leadership skills may work out as a manager. Otherwise, a sales professional should report directly to a department chair or the managing partner. Create a reasonable set of goals for year one since it takes time to develop or transfer relationships. After that, a quarterly sales forecast of what he or she is working on is a must data tool to begin to monitor opportunities and to measure results.

Hiring an experienced sales person may just be the best thing the firm will do to drive new revenue and profits.

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