

Law Firm Business Development: Effective Cross-Selling Requires Trust

By [LawVision](#) on October 20, 2015

Now that most firms have recognized the value of going to market by industry, most have established formal industry teams. The natural next step in the business development evolution that's occurring in the industry is the development of client teams and, in some cases, the adoption of strategic account management principles.

The primary objective for deploying cross-disciplinary client teams should be to deliver maximum value to your clients. When value is delivered, relationship and revenue growth will follow. Cross-selling activity requires a lot of trust to be effective; trust by the client for the lawyer/law firm and trust by the lawyer who has established the client relationship for their own partners. As consultants, we talk about the concept that people buy from people that they like and trust all the time. When we're sharing this fact about buying behavior, we're typically talking to lawyers and are referring to their external relationship with clients and prospective clients.

I thought I'd take this opportunity to shine a light on the value of developing trust internally as well. If your partner doesn't trust you, he/she is not going to introduce you to his/her client; it's as simple as that. It's important to note that the trust I'm referring to manifests itself in two forms; competence trust and interpersonal trust. The former refers to the fact that your partner doesn't think that you possess the requisite technical skill to offer best-in-class counsel (and, therefore, value) to their respective client. A lack of interpersonal trust means that your partner is concerned that you are going to "steal" their client after the introduction is made. Addressing these two forms of trust is of utmost importance if a firm desires to have a culture that is institutionally-minded, rather than individually-minded. There isn't a one-size-fits-all answer to how to establish, build, fix, etc. trust internally. Typically, it requires a lead-by-example leadership team, a savvy marketing department who is able to help with internal marketing, transparent communication, and individual lawyers who are more interested in delivering value to their clients than they are being ranked as one of the firm's top 3 originators year-over-year.

This issue of trust is of critical importance to developing deep relationships internally and this internal trust will result in more cross-disciplinary conversations with clients externally. If you're not focused on building trust across practices and offices, perhaps you've identified the reason that your client team program isn't as successful as you'd like it to be.