

Law Firm Professional Development: The Importance of Trust

By [LawVision](#) on January 20, 2017

An element that is rarely included in professional development and related business development curriculums in law firms is the topic of “trust.” Trust is difficult to quantify and as a result, difficult to measure. So creating a professional development training “module” to increase trust across your firm may be a challenge.

Cross-selling activity depends on a high level 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 fact that people buy from people who they like and trust all the time. When we’re sharing this fact about buying behavior, we’re typically addressing the lawyers and are referring to their external relationship with clients and prospective clients. It’s equally important to shine a light on the value of developing trust internally as well. If a partner doesn’t trust another partner or group of partners (e.g., an office, a group of laterals, etc.) they’re not going to introduce those lawyers to their client. A quick note: the trust that I’m referring to manifests itself in two forms; competence trust and interpersonal trust. The former refers to the fact that a partner doesn’t think that another partner or group of partners possess the requisite technical skills to offer best-in-class counsel (and, therefore, value) to their respective client. A lack of interpersonal trust means that a partner is concerned that another may “steal” their client after the introduction is made. Addressing these two forms of trust as part of a professional development program 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. However, most typically, it requires a lead-by-example leadership team, a savvy marketing department who is able to help with internal marketing, transparent and frequent 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 fee 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. To incorporate trust-building into training programs and planning efforts, have partners focus on three to five internal relationships they will build with partners who do not know them. Trust builds when people know one another and learn about each other’s work including deals and cases. To remove the primary reason why client teams and related cross-selling fail, focus on building trust throughout your organization.

What efforts are being undertaken at your firm to build trust?