

Negotiating Your Way to Business Development Success

By [Silvia L. Coulter](#) on March 22, 2013

Lawyers can be brilliant business generators. Even if one is not the savvy extroverted networker, any lawyer with good lawyering skills can be wildly successful at business generation. How can this be so? To start with, it is necessary to stop thinking sales is beyond one's reach and that it is a skill so far afield from what was learned in law school and on the job training. Instead, think of the skills necessary to be a good lawyer including:

- Listening skills
- People resources and contacts
- Negotiation skills
- Quick thinking

We've often heard "I did not go to law school to be a sales person." As I was listening to a great litigator/negotiator the other day, training a group of associates, it struck me that all of the negotiation skills workshops I've taken were taught by lawyers. A few tips he gave stood out as quite easily bridged to sales:

1. Never pick up the phone to call someone, sit across the table in a meeting with someone or email an individual, without knowing what you would like to get out of the communication.
2. Plan for and understand the next step of the process and appropriate questions to ask to help reach that step.
3. Ask questions that will guide the conversation in a direction you want it to go—you will also control the conversation. Listen more than talk.
4. Try not to react. Stick to your key points and respond only after you have thought through how the dialogue will go after you speak.

Of course a prospect or a client is not an "opponent," so the exchanges need to be about building trust and relationships. Clients tell us they want to like their outside counsel.

Using the skills for the craft practiced daily will open many opportunities for closing business. I'd welcome dialog about this concept.