

Why You Should Quit Asking for Work

By [LawVision](#) on July 24, 2019

When frustrated CMOs at law firms hire me to coach a lawyer, they will often say something like: “Teach him how to ask for business,” or “She has trouble making the ask.”

Asking for business, or “closing,” is often difficult for lawyers. The difficulty lies in a set of common fears. These are:

1. Fear of failure and rejection
2. Fear of looking needy and thus incompetent
3. Fear of looking pushy and offensive
4. Fear of ruining a good relationship by asking for something

These fears stem primarily from one fundamental misconception about closing business. Which is that closing is not so much about “asking”; rather, it’s more about the logical next step in an effort to serve someone.

Salespeople and would-be rainmakers sometimes tie themselves in knots over how to ask that final closing question. It is good to prepare, role-play, and script closing questions; at some point, asking those questions is important. But the magic isn’t in that final question—it’s in the process that leads up to that question and the attitude with which it is asked.

Think about your career for a moment. Becoming a partner at a good-size firm with a great brand and reputation is not easy to do. You worked hard to get good grades in college and score high on entrance exams. You spent many sleepless nights away from your family preparing for law school exams and the bar exam. The tuition and living expenses were a huge sacrifice. You may even still be paying off some of that debt. You work long hours at your firm. Perhaps you haven’t seen your children in the daylight for months at a time. You’ve sacrificed time and resources, and the outcome is your knowledge and ability to solve complex, thorny problems in your area of expertise. You have an incredible amount of information in your head. You can solve a prospect’s challenge because you have done it repeatedly for so many others. Not only can you solve it, you have ideas for creative ways to truly improve your prospect’s position. It is even possible that you are the only one in your market who can solve this problem as well as you can. So, why are you begging for work? Stop asking and start serving.

Why do we get so caught up in “making the ask?” Often our attitude is that prospects are doing *us* a favor. In our minds, we say things like: “If only they would give us the work, I will hit my numbers this year.” “If I could just land this client, I can make partner.” “If I bring in this matter, my partners will see that I can be a rainmaker too.” That mind-set needs to be flipped. You have a great background; you have knowledge that will help this prospect, and that knowledge didn’t come easily. You have the ability to solve a key problem for someone. They are *not* doing you a favor. You are, in fact, doing one for them.

So how do you drive that message home? The secret is that it’s not in the asking, it’s in the proving.

Sales and business development is a process with four fundamental steps.

1. Seeking—identifying good candidates who may need your services

2. Assessing—building trust, building a relationship, identifying needs, and determining whether your capabilities match a prospect’s needs
3. Solving—finding a solution to an identified challenge and articulating that to the prospect
4. Committing—removing obstacles to moving forward, having the prospect select you as the solution to the problem, and committing to move forward

If you jump to step 4 before completing the other steps, it will be uncomfortable for both you and the prospect and will lay open all the fears described above. You will worry that the prospect might not say yes. You will feel like you are asking for a favor and thereby appearing as if you are not a good enough lawyer to get work without charity. You will feel awkward and be afraid that you are being too pushy or “salesy.” You may even feel that asking for the work might jeopardize an otherwise healthy social relationship.

Paying attention to the important earlier steps first changes the dynamic completely. If I have taken the time to build trust so the prospect knows that I care about him or her and that I am an expert at what I do; if I have worked hard to understand the prospect’s business, business needs, and specific current challenge; if I have matched that challenge to my capability to solve the problem and shown the prospect how I intend to solve the problem, then I have earned the right to do that prospect’s work.

At that point, the close is not an “ask”; it is an offer to serve. The attitude is that I am not asking you for a favor, I am pointing out that you have a very serious problem and because of the hard work I have done, the knowledge I have amassed, and the firm I have chosen to align myself with, I can help you solve that problem. You are not doing me a favor. I am taking care of your needs. I am helping you, and I am doing it in a way that very few others can because my life to this point has been preparing me to solve this very problem. This is actually your lucky day. Not mine. I am here for you, and this is how we are going to solve it together.

To solve this problem, we should get started right away. Let’s get the client agreement signed, run the conflicts check, and take you through our intake process right away because you need this solved, and we can do it. Our first planning meeting should be on Thursday. Is 10:00 a.m. good for you?

I haven’t asked for a favor; it’s not awkward; it’s not scary. I’m just being a good lawyer and taking care of you.

Quit begging and start serving.