Ten Tips to Add Octane to Your Business Development/Client Retention Activities

By Silvia L. Coulter on July 13, 2020

In tough economic times, business development takes on added importance. Here are some truly simple, yet often overlooked ways of adding some fuel to your business development activities. These tips are for seasoned rainmakers as well as for junior lawyers. Business development success is all about the basics.

1. **Make it easy for people to do business with you.** Add your contact information to the emails you initiate and to the emails to which you reply. It's easy to do and it makes life much easier for people who are trying to find your contact information. In Outlook, click on Tools; Options; Mail Format and Signatures, and you will see how easy it is to check the box to add your contact info to all messages.
2. **Get your contact information into a user-friendly format.** Provide the opportunity for people to download your v-card directly from your bio. Then all your contacts have to do is click on your v-card and save it in their files. Again, this makes it easy for them to do business with you. If they have to copy all your information from your bio manually, it may not get done and then your info is not what's in their files!
3. **Categorize your contacts in Outlook.** Go to your "Contacts" folder and look for the "Category" label and click on it. You can add multiple (not too many!) categories to sort through your contacts quickly and efficiently. Most firm databases easily transfer this information from Outlook to the database information you have on file. This allows you to then sort through your contacts for specific purposes (e.g., IP in house counsel would have IP as a category and In house counsel as a category). To be totally efficient, have your assistant print out your contacts for you. You can then write onto your list which categories you want each contact to be labeled with. Some of the suggestions we have: industry, specialty, position, holiday card, gender, etc.
4. **Rebuild past relationships.** So often we try to meet new people and we already have a lot of good clients who are contacts. Make it a point to call every past client you've ever had. They are either referral sources or sources of new business (repeat business) for you. This is one of the best ways to obtain new business. It works all the time for our clients. Whether they CEOs for whom you did a deal or in house counsel who had the firm work on one case, call them to find out how they are doing. Go back at least ten years and make it a point to call to say hello and hear how their life/their business is going. You'll be amazed at the results.
5. **Thank your clients for doing business with you.** It may sound trite, but it works. Make a special effort to write a hand-written note or place a phone call to each client and thank him/her for doing business with you/your firm. They will always appreciate the special effort.
6. **Send a gift.** Everyone likes presents. Send a book from the NY Times bestseller list for summer reading; send your favorite new book on leadership to senior executives with whom you do business. For people who send referrals your way, thank them by sending a thank you gift for the gesture once you land the new client. For referrals that may not end up as a client, send the referring party a thank you note for thinking of you enough to recommend you. These gestures go a long way toward building relationships.
7. **Know your clients.** Identify the top five clients with whom you work. Take each one to lunch or schedule a virtual lunch, and learn more about their business. If you are limited due to geographic distance, then visit their web site and learn about their business goals and products by reading press releases, the CEO's mission statement and investor relations' pages if public. Ask them how they are doing this year with their goals. People like to know they matter to you and that you are interested. We hear all the time from clients of firms that few of those with whom

they have outside relationships ask these questions.

8. **Contact firm alumni.** Firm alum represent a huge source of new business or referrals. This, quite simply, is almost always an untapped opportunity. Obtain the list from your HR or recruiting team and email/dial away!
9. **Get set up on Linked In and Facebook.** Complete your profiles so it's easy to find you—keep in mind you will want to maintain the utmost professional profile at all times. Again, make it easy for people to find you and to do business with you. To learn more about Linked In, visit the website linkedin.com, or westlegaledcenter.com for a November 2008 webcast on the topic. If you are in a large firm, ask your IT people to provide you with a tutorial.
10. **Think of three things to say that will make you memorable when you meet people, aka your elevator pitch.** For example, if you are an M&A lawyer, don't just say "I'm an M&A lawyer with XX law firm." That's not entirely memorable. Try something like, "I help businesses grow (Note: this focuses on end results and benefits to the buyer) and when I'm not working for clients, I enjoy hiking and other outdoor activities with my family." They'll remember you the next time. Give people opportunities to connect with you by saying things about yourself that they will remember. It makes you much more interesting too.

Silvia Coulter is a co-founding Principal at LawVision. She works with firms to help drive revenue through strategic selling and training programs, key account development and management and sales coaching. scoulter@lawvision.com