The Top Ten Law Firm Business Development Don'ts

By Silvia L. Coulter on May 28, 2015

At a recent retreat I had a number of partners ask me "What are the top "Don'ts" of business development? While I prefer to be more positive, (focusing on the Do list) here's my list:

1. Don't wait for the prospect to call you—even if they say they will get back to you, let them know if you don't hear from them, you'll call to touch base. Then be sure to schedule it on your calendar.
2. Don't wait for the client to ask you for an update. Unprompted updates are very much appreciated and since clients are the key to more work and referrals to others, it's best to be proactive with updates even if the update is very brief.
3. Don't give a boring sales presentation. Rather, share insights and invite comment from the prospective client's team members who are attending the meeting. There is nothing fun about sitting through a "talking heads" presentation that's all about you, your practice group and the firm. Oh, and don't invite colleagues to the pitch meetings unless they have an active role. One person should not be doing all the talking.
4. Don't have incorrect contact information. Keep contact info up to date and stay on top of recent changes in titles, etc. LinkedIn is a good place to catch updates.
5. Don't be one of those lawyers who hoards clients and contacts. Teams will always outperform individuals and introducing others to clients and contacts will give you a much better chance of retaining and growing relationships. In the end, you will lose more than you win if you are not sharing clients and contacts—we've seen this over and over and over again. In fact, I think it's my #1 "Don't."
6. Don't reach out to contacts just once a year—four times a year is necessary to stay "top of mind" and to have the best chance of getting the next piece of business from them.
7. Don't "pitch" unprepared. Prepare with the same energy you would for a client meeting. It will show. Practice the meeting and following #3 above.
8. Don't lose track of your best opportunities. Create a sales pipeline and even when you are very busy, this will be your sales to do list. These should be names of companies and individuals with whom you have the best shot at closing business in the near term. Email me if you'd like a copy of our sales pipeline form.
9. Don't assume you will get business if you don't ask for it. You must directly ask for the business. Demonstrate confidence during the sales process to show you are a confident lawyer and will be so on your client's behalf once engaged.
10. Don't forget to thank referral sources for their referrals—even if it doesn't always turn into business. A hand-written note with a Starbucks or Apple gift card even in a smaller denomination is a good gesture to show you appreciate their referral. You may even get another one!

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