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Marketing Leadership: Inspirational Techniques for Changing the Firm Culture

By Robert N. Kohn

There is an anti-marketing culture that is pervasive in many law firms. In these firms, lawyers do not feel impelled to market. They think that marketing is beneath them. They have prejudices about marketing such as the belief that it involves sleazy sales tactics, or that it requires an outgoing sales personality, which they don't possess.

As a marketing leader in your firm, you have the opportunity to help promote a proactive marketing culture. This is a culture in which lawyers understand the importance of marketing, and support each other in their marketing efforts. And, one of your most potent leadership skills for promoting a proactive marketing culture is *inspiration*.

Often, people do not think of themselves as being inspirational. But, it has been my experience that everyone has the potential to inspire. Here are six techniques that will help you to inspire change in the marketing attitudes and behavior of the lawyers in your firm.

1. Document Your Expertise

In order to inspire the lawyers in your firm to change their attitudes and behavior, they must first have faith in your credibility as a marketing authority. If you have been promoted from an administrative or secretarial position, without prior marketing credentials, projecting an image as a marketing authority may be particularly challenging. Once lawyers have categorized someone in a specific role, it is difficult to change their perception of that person. However, as you develop marketing expertise, you can shift the way in which you are perceived by communicating your expertise. Think of it as your personal self-promotion campaign.

Two important methods for communicating your marketing expertise are getting published and giving speeches. Writing and speaking credits will enhance your resume. And, reprints of published articles can be distributed to lawyers as tangible evidence of your expertise. You can take classes if you need to improve your writing skills, or overcome your fear of public speaking.

Another way to communicate your expertise is to discuss marketing with an increased level of sophistication. Support your opinions and ideas

with established marketing principles. Quote marketing articles and books. Describe the philosophies behind specific marketing campaigns of businesses in industries other than the legal community.

Lawyers typically have a limited perception of marketing. They often think of marketing as only promotional activities such as advertising, branding, networking and other forms of outreach. This limited understanding of marketing tends to demean the value of marketing in their eyes.

In the general business community marketing is a central, driving force. Marketing departments are consulted on every major decision concerning product or service development, pricing and distribution. Universities offer degrees in marketing. By being able to discuss the broader, more sophisticated principles of marketing, you help increase the credibility of marketing in the eyes of lawyers, as well as communicate your personal expertise.

2. Prove that Marketing is Honorable

The law firm anti-marketing sentiment is constantly reinforced by exposure to salespeople who use dishonorable sales tactics. These dishonorable tactics are prevalent in industries where the consummation of the sale represents the end of the interaction. For example, when someone buys a car, the salesperson doesn't handle the ongoing service. By contrast for most lawyers, closing the sale means continuing the relationship. Dishonorable and abusive marketing techniques cannot work for lawyers, whose clients expect ongoing, trusting, supportive and loyal service.

Lawyers can learn that marketing is honorable. A fundamental marketing principle is that you strengthen relationships with prospects by giving value. Lawyers can provide value in the form of educating prospects, making quality

introductions, offering their expertise to charitable causes, etc. These are highly honorable marketing strategies, which over time will help lawyers communicate not only the value of their service, but more importantly, the quality of their character.

3. Instill Self-confidence

Another step in inspiring lawyers to change is to help them appreciate that they already have the fundamental skills necessary to market. There is a fundamental misconception that marketers are born. To many, it seems as if there is a **marketing gene**.

True, there are certain individuals who are outgoing, and who enjoy marketing. However, marketing is a skill. And, like all skills it can be learned. In fact, all lawyers have the ability to learn how to market. This is because much of marketing requires intelligence, communication skills and the ability to do good work – all qualities possessed by lawyers. What they don't have is marketing successes. If you can get them to take small steps and have them enjoy small successes they will develop self-confidence with their marketing skills.

4. Create a Vision of a Better Future

Another inspirational technique is helping lawyers envision a better future. Lawyers need to be aware of the significant long-term benefits of marketing. Some of these benefits are money; power; personal growth; friends; team spirit and improved clientele. However, in addition to describing these benefits, it is particularly inspirational to help someone experience the emotional impact of each benefit. I recommend bringing lawyers through the **Emotional Spectrum** as you describe each benefit.

For example, if you want lawyers to imagine the benefit of upgrading their clientele, begin by having them think about client experiences that

are emotionally charged. First, ask them to describe some of their problem clients. Do these clients complain a lot? Are they unpleasant to be with? Are they slow to pay? Next, have them describe their favorite clients. Are they interesting? Are they fun? By experiencing the range of emotions associated with good and bad clients, lawyers appreciate at a deeper level how upgrading their clientele can lead to a more enjoyable, fulfilling career.

5. Provide a Methodology

Lawyers are more likely to feel inspired to market when they understand your methodology. I am reminded of the time when I was learning to Roller Blade. My main problem was the fear of falling. Several instructors tried to help me by **showing** me how they skate, and then **telling** me not to be afraid of falling. But, none of these instructors helped me overcome my fear. Then, I was introduced to a wonderful instructor who focused on a specific method. She began the session by confidently saying: "I teach Roller Blading in three steps. 1. How to bend your knees. 2. How to rotate your ankles 3. And how to shift your weight." I remember feeling reassured and exhilarated by this structured and well thought-out approach. And in fact, I was so focused on the methodology that I completely forgot about my fear.

When I teach lawyers how to market, I always have them use checklists and forms. For example, one form is to help them identify their specific obstacles to marketing. Another is to help them prioritize their most important targets, and develop relationship-building strategies. Lawyers are always able to appreciate how this organized methodology can guide them through the difficult ordeal of learning to market.

6. Reward Success

In firms with an anti-marketing culture, marketing efforts are typically not rewarded. In

fact, they are often discouraged. However, in order to be inspired, lawyers must be rewarded for their successes. Giving financial incentives is one approach. But, in addition to money, lawyers need praise. Dale Carnegie wrote in his book, How to Win Friends & Influence People: "Abilities wither under criticism; they blossom under encouragement. To become a more effective leader of people, praise the slightest improvement and praise every improvement."

So, be prolific and generous in your acknowledgement. Frequently, announce marketing successes in meetings and memos. And, don't limit your praise to actual work in the door. Congratulate someone for joining an organization, or taking a CPA to lunch. Long-term results come from small, intermediate steps.

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