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Doing Business With Friends

By Robert N. Kohn
and Lawrence M. Kohn

One of the obstacles to marketing is the issue of converting friendships into business relationships. Lawyers often feel uncomfortable discussing the availability of their legal services with their friends. One concern is the risk of losing the relationship by either imposing on it or failing to meet expectations. Another problem is not wanting to discuss sensitive personal matters.

While, these are valid concerns, it would be unfortunate to categorically dismiss the opportunity of doing business with friends. The fact is, friends can be a significant marketing resource. We know many lawyers who regularly represent and receive referrals from their friends. In fact, some friendships are significantly enhanced by a business relationship. We suggest that you analyze each friendship individually, carefully looking at the opportunities and risks. You may discover that it is appropriate to do business with a select group.

Initiating business conversations with Friends

Once a friend is identified as a prospect, the next question is, how do you appropriately bring up the subject of providing legal services? Here are some indirect and direct methods.

Talk about your legal activities

One indirect method is to increase your dialogue about the daily activities in your practice. For example, a common lost opportunity may be your response to the question, "What's new?" Instead of saying, "Not much, what's new with you?," consider talking about an interesting case or legal issue.

You can also transition from social dialogue to business dialogue by identifying issues that appear in current events which also appear in your practice. For example, in talking about a current issue you could say, "I experienced something like that in my practice." Another technique is to invite your friends to law-related programs which they may find interesting. All of these indirect techniques help to paint a picture of you as a lawyer, as well as a friend.

Provide "Full disclosure"

A much more direct approach for initiating the subject of business with friends is a technique we call, '*Full Disclosure*.' Full Disclosure is the process of introducing a sensitive topic by first fully disclosing your feelings and concerns. For example, assume that you have a close friend who owns a business, and you think you could do a good job as their lawyer. But, you are uncomfortable suggesting it because you are worried that it might be perceived as an unwelcome offer.

An example of using the full disclosure technique would be to say something along the following lines: "I'd like to discuss something

that is really important to me. I think it would be of great value to both of us. But before bringing it up, I want you to know that I feel a little uncomfortable mentioning it. I really value our friendship and I don't want you to feel that I'm imposing on it in any way. If you are not comfortable with my suggestion, just let me know and I won't bring it up again. With that in mind, I'd like to express my interest in talking about how I could help your business using my legal skills." This dialogue allows you to bring up a sensitive issue without placing your friend in an awkward position.

Of course, doing business with friends is a personal decision. Friendships are too valuable to be taken lightly. But, make sure that your concern about doing business with friends does not eliminate the possibility of harvesting this potentially valuable resource. In fact, you may find it helpful to remember the following poem:

Business With Friends

Business with friends offers great dividends.

You can market yourself while relaxing.

Dinner out is a night off, as well as a write-off.

That's why business with friends is less taxing.

About the authors: Robert N. Kohn and Lawrence M. Kohn are nationally known authorities on legal marketing and management. They can be reached at (310) 652-1442 or KohnCommunications.com. Robert N. Kohn is Vice Chair of the California State Bar Law Practice Management and Technology Section.