

BIZ DEV BREAKTHROUGH!

By Lawrence M. Kohn and Robert N. Kohn

You may want to gear up your business development efforts but find it overwhelming to add additional activities into an already crammed calendar. That's because you have created activities that work for you and behavioral patterns that are deeply entrenched. The following are some tips to help you break through the barriers.

The most important step in blending business development into a busy schedule is to understand that you can't rely on willpower. Willpower means forcing yourself to do something that you know is good for you, but is unpleasant. Anyone who has tried to diet or quit a bad habit knows that willpower is almost always defeated.

Instead of willpower, you need to be motivated by Breakthrough Conviction. Breakthrough Conviction is the feeling you get when:

1. You deeply believe your new behavior is the best decision you could make.
2. You are optimistic about the results.
3. You will be proud of your behavior.

Breakthrough Conviction is a remarkable force that will change the behavior of even the most recalcitrant non-marketer.

One way to develop Breakthrough Conviction in business development is to acknowledge that business development is one of the most important areas in your life worth improving. Consider the benefits you will enjoy if you are successful. Of course, there are the obvious benefits: more income; more prestige; more control over selecting the matters you choose to handle. Then there are the lesser-known, but extremely valuable, benefits: More friends and, more fun. You may think of other benefits, and it is a good exercise to add them to this list.

It is key to acknowledge that all these benefits are profoundly significant. Yet, for some lawyers, a list of benefits may appear superficial or even inappropriate. If this is happening to you, take a moment and challenge your concerns.

More income could mean less debt, the possibility of early retirement, a better education for your children, and the ability to be more charitable. More prestige means being admired by others, which makes it easier to develop business in the future. More control over the matters you choose to handle allows you to invest your time in the activities that challenge and inspire you. More friends and more fun bring joy to your life and the people you love. So don't be casual about acknowledging the ways your life could be dramatically improved. The benefits are real and will make undeniable enhancements to your well-being.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT WORKS WHEN YOU COMMUNICATE VALUE TO THE RIGHT PEOPLE

In addition to the benefits, you should also understand the risks of failing to accept business development responsibility. Let's take a brief (albeit uncomfortable) stroll on the



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dark side and consider the risks you face if you fail to develop ways to bring in new clients. Regardless of your current success, bad things could happen. Clients could die or merge, or fail, or retire. People who feed you work could stop—either because they don't have it or they decide to give it to someone else. Forces completely beyond your control could wipe out the market you serve.

This is not the script from some B-rated horror film. These are not rare or exaggerated occurrences. They happen every day to hard-working, skilled lawyers with lovely families. In the two years following September 2008, over 10,000 lawyers lost their jobs. You can rest assured that they were not the lawyers with large books of business. Unless you are independently wealthy,

**IMPROVING YOUR BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT SKILLS MAY BE
THE SINGLE MOST VALUABLE
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if you don't know how to bring in business, you are at risk—even if you feel secure and successful today. (Sorry about bringing you through this, but you may have needed a dose of reality).

Even knowing the risks and benefits may not give you Breakthrough Conviction. So you should ask yourself the question: "How does improving business development skills compare to improving other skills in my life?" Would taking on more administrative responsibilities bring you as many benefits? Would billing more hours bring you as many benefits? Would improving your legal skills bring you as many benefits? If so, then do those.

But, there is a good possibility that improving your business development skills may be the single most valuable change you can make. If you sincerely take

ownership of this concept, you are poised to make some important changes. But you still may not have Breakthrough Conviction.

That may be because there are many beliefs about business development that prevent you from giving it your attention. For example, you may be skeptical about your ability to be successful at business development. If you feel that business development is a waste of your time, you won't do it.

Skeptics may have tried to bring in clients and failed. So they remain skeptical. Skeptics need to know that business development works when you communicate value to the right people. Failure means you either did not communicate to the right people, or you did not communicate value. If past efforts failed, it was not business development that failed, it was you. And because you were smart enough to become a lawyer, you are smart enough to learn effective business development skills. There is nothing about business development that you can't understand or implement!

You may also feel that participating in business development will be embarrassing. It is common for lawyers to feel that business development activities reveal neediness or even incompetence. They cling to the notion that prospects are thinking, "Good lawyers don't need to market. This lawyer is marketing so he or she must not be good." Of course this is not valid. When you communicate value to the right people, prospects think, "Wow, this is valuable." Prospects don't judge skilled marketers harshly. They appreciate them.

You may also feel that business development requires that you be pushy. But this is not true. Communicating value to the right people demonstrates value, not pushiness. Another common belief is that you don't have the time to implement business development activities. But, this is not true.

The single most important business development activity only takes an instant. And that is being aware of the business development opportunity that is in front of you right now. For example, you may be working on a matter that could be the topic of an article. That article could differentiate you as more capable than your competitor who has not written or published an article. Also, the matter you are working on right now may provide solutions to problems that other clients have. So you could provide valuable solutions to them. But that won't happen if you don't notice the opportunity.

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Every day, opportunities cross your desk. And, when you notice them, you can analyze if they will enhance your ability to bring in more business. If you really believe they will, you will most certainly find the time to do them.

Another way to deal with a lack of time is to delegate. You could delegate your legal work and/or you could delegate much of your business development. Hire a blogger. Hire someone to manage your Facebook, Linked-In and Twitter accounts. Hire a ghostwriter. Hire a publicist.

But whatever you do, don't rely on willpower. If your heart isn't in it, you will probably fail. And failure reinforces skepticism. Rather, make a conscious effort to think through the benefits and risks. Challenge your obstacles and make sure they are not false friends who

appear to be protecting you from your fears but are in reality holding you back. Business development is not the edgy thing to do. It is the conservative business strategy. And if you want it, you have the power within you to have it.

Lawrence Kohn and Robert Kohn are principals of *Kohn Communications*, founded in 1985. They were early pioneers in coaching lawyers via the telephone to be more effective in business development. They are the co-authors of the best-selling American Bar Association book, *Selling In Your Comfort Zone*, now available at *Amazon.com*. The Kohn Web site, www.kohncommunications.com, has dozens of articles, free seminars, and valuable tools dealing with law firm marketing and management.