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How to Build a Business Development Culture

Law firms face all kinds of problems when they try to cultivate a business development culture. The guiding principle for overcoming these obstacles is to find strategies that lawyers can get excited about. People are more willing to be engaged in projects that are interesting and exciting. Here are ten tips for building a business development culture.

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Law firms face all kinds of problems when they try to cultivate a business development culture. Many lawyers are not interested in business development. They're usually busy and they're probably earning a comfortable living. So the need to develop business doesn't seem pressing. Even more significantly, a lot of lawyers hate the idea of selling. In their minds, it evokes images of being pushy, invasive, sleazy, manipulative and needy. Many lawyers are skeptical about their ability to generate business and so they are reluctant to invest time or money. And they don't like sharing relationships, so are unwilling to support cross-selling or internal business development.

The guiding principle for overcoming these obstacles is to find strategies that lawyers can get excited about. People are more willing to be engaged in projects that are interesting and exciting. Here are ten tips for building a business development culture.

Tip #1: Focus on the Personal Benefits

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The first tip is to make sure everyone is aware of the profound benefits of business development — and to continually remind them of these benefits. While some of the may seem obvious, we have found that to non-marketers, the benefits of business development often are not intuitive.

These benefits include:

- More money;
- More security;
- More authority;

- Better and more interesting clients;
- Greater team spirit;
- Protection against the competition;
- Smoothing out the peaks and valleys of work; and
- More fun, friends and community

Knowing the benefits is highly motivational. People are more likely to pay attention to things that are perceived as personally beneficial.

Tip #2: Define Your Superior Qualities

One reason why professionals are not excited about marketing is that they don't see themselves as being different from the competition. If they're not excited about what they offer, then why would anyone else be? You should talk about the superior ways the partners deliver services. What tools do they use? What checklists? What software? Do they conduct best-practices meetings? If not, should they? They have got to be able to answer the question, "How do you offer superior value?"

As partners develop greater confidence in the value they offer, they will become more excited about letting their contacts know about it. And, they will have more success in getting people to respond.

Tip #3: Create a Shared Vocabulary

A shared vocabulary helps you communicate your vision and to develop ideas. Often, people have a different understanding of common terminology. Basic concepts like "Targets," "Market Segment" and "Offers" can mean

strikingly different things to different people. So, make sure everyone is using the same definitions for the terms.

Tip #4: Find Comfortable and Interesting Ways of Marketing

One of your goals is to help each lawyer find things they are excited about doing. There are so many ways of marketing such as writing, speaking, visiting clients, leadership in organizations, and entertaining. You need to help lawyers figure out what they would enjoy doing.

Tip #5: Identify Targets

Another important goal is to gain clarity about who your targets are. We believe that everybody should maintain a list of their top 10 targets. Imagine if everyone in your firm were to identify a minimum of 10 quality targets. Let's say you have five people in your business development team. If you have an average of 10 targets per person, that would be 50 quality targets that you could pursue for business. You'd get some work from that.

Tip #6: Develop Compelling Offers

Offers are something of value that motivate your targets. There are different kinds of offers. There are complimentary offers to strangers, designed to motivate them to meet you. There are first-follow-up offers after you meet someone for the first time. There are trust-building offers, low-cost closing offers, and offers to existing clients as a way of expanding relationships. When lawyers find something they are proud to offer, they'll be more excited about reaching out. And their targets will be more interested in responding. So an important part of your culture is to develop an inventory of offers.

Tip #7: Create Systems for Meeting New People

Business development is a numbers game. The more people you meet, the more successful you'll become. We like to say that if it's who you know that determines your success, then it's who you meet that should guide your marketing. So, a big part of your discussions is to focus on strategies for meeting new people.

There are basically three ways of meeting new people — organizations, leveraging, and invitations to events. Make sure that someone is in charge of pursuing each technique.

Tip #8: Teach Process

Another tip is to define business development as a process. Lawyers typically like structure. They like to think and do things in a systematic way. The process that we teach has five steps:

1. Meet new targets;
2. Build trust;
3. Clarify needs;
4. Get approved; and
5. Close.

When you explain marketing in this systematic way, it is easier to understand and embrace.

Tip #9: Find a Marketing Buddy

An important part of building your firm's business development culture is finding a buddy. A marketing buddy is like a jogging buddy who helps you clarify your thinking and provides accountability. A marketing buddy doesn't

coach or give advice. He or she just asks questions, like “Why did you make that decision?”

Tip #10: Conduct Effective Meetings

And finally, building a culture requires that you need to meet as a group to discuss your ideas. But a lot of people don't like meetings, which are often run poorly and can be a terrible waste of time. If you want people to attend your meetings, then they have to be worthwhile and they have to have specific guidelines so that people will want to attend. Following are 10 rules for good meetings.

1. Schedule a practical time.
2. Require total attendance.
3. Limit the topic; don't schedule any other business agenda.
4. Start and finish exactly on time.
5. Keep the meeting short.
6. Divide the time equally. Don't let the successful marketers upstage the others.
7. Focus on the future. This stimulates both creative thinking and commitments to accomplish specific tasks.
8. Avoid bragging.
9. Forbid negativism.

10. Promote mutual support. Everyone should help everyone. The marketing meeting is an opportunity to hear other peoples' plans, and offer support and suggestions.

Conclusion

The secret to your success in building a business development culture is to help lawyers become aware of more interesting options. As lawyers understand that business development does not have to be the distasteful experience they imagine, but rather an exciting process that can realistically be achieved and that will lead to profound benefits, they are more likely to embrace business development and stay engaged in the process.

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