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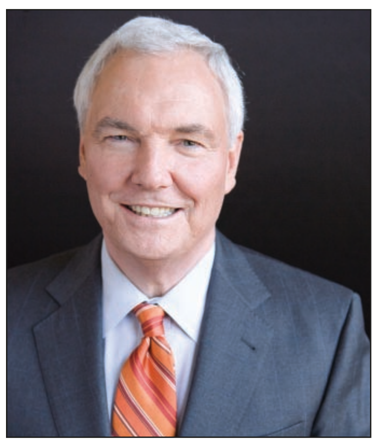
Practical Ideas On Client Development For Associates

I have done a lot of work helping associates with client development in my old firm and now as a coach. In this article, I want to share with you my practical ideas on associate client development.

Set Yourself Apart

Client development is more challenging today for a variety of reasons. First, business clients are no longer local or loyal and there are many more lawyers from which to choose. Second, you have less time but more choices of client development actions. Because you have too many choices, you may either never get started, or become ineffective in your efforts.



However, if you have a plan, become visible to your target market and find ways to become a valuable resource and advisor for those clients and potential clients, you can become very successful. It is important that you start your efforts as early in your career as possible.

Client Development Myths

Associates seem to buy into client development myths and this stifles their efforts. Here are several of those myths:

- You either have it or you don't. I can tell you from my personal experience that I did not have it. Knowing that drove me to work at it and develop my skills;
- Just do good work, get a Martindale AV rating, and wait for the phone to ring. There are thousands of lawyers in your city or area who do good work. Client development is a contact sport. It is about building relationships and adding value beyond the good work;
- Too young, and inexperienced to…." Lawyers should start learning client development skills as early as possible. This is a marathon not a sprint and even though you may not bring in a client now that fits your firm's client profile, you are building towards doing so later;
- You have to be an extrovert and know how to work a room. I know lawyers who are very outgoing and do poorly because they talk about themselves and do not listen. I know introverted lawyers who do very well because they ask great questions and listen who do very well;
- You have to "ask" for business. Lawyers who are good at asking for business do not come across as needy or greedy. I, personally, was uncomfortable asking so I tried to be the "go to" lawyer who would be sought by clients in my target market; and

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- Associates in big firms do not need to learn client development. At the very least, associates in big firms with institutional clients need to learn about those clients and find ways to become more valuable to them. As expressed above, institutional clients are no longer loyal, They can't be counted on as they have been in the past. So learning the skill set to get new clients is more important today than before.

What Successful Associates Share In Common

Here are some of the characteristics that I have observed over the years in the most successful associates:

- They are patient, persistent, and perseverant;
- They focus client development on things they are passionate about;
- They have a plan for their non-billable time as well as written goals;
- They regularly work on client development;
- They are seeking to become more visible to their target markets;
- They are getting feedback on their ideas and how they are doing;
- They find ways to hold themselves accountable;
- They all wish they had started their efforts earlier in their careers.

What Differences Do Associates Have?

Several associates with whom I have worked are "connectors." Those lawyers are active in their communities and/or active in the Bar. Other associates enjoy writing. They are writing articles that are published. When supported by their firms, they are blogging. Those lawyers are using writing as a way to get speaking engagements in front of their target markets.

Associates I have coached do their planning in a variety of ways. Some associates begin their planning looking forward five years and then working back. Others emphasize setting 90 days goals. Several associates use weekly plans and journals as their method of holding themselves accountable.

Successful associates do not "find" time for client development. Instead they *make* time. Each associate develops different ways of making it. Several associates with whom I have worked spend time on client development after their children go to bed. Some associates work on client development on weekend mornings.

Some associates are using LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter as tools to reconnect with classmates, firm alums, friends, and potential clients. Others are reaching out by phone.

Deliberate Practice

Practice things you want to get better at doing. Examples might include:

- Treating your supervising lawyers like clients, figuring out what they want and need and exceeding their expectations;
- Finding out what is going on that impacts your clients;
- Networking;
- Working on your elevator speech/questions;
- Identifying future issues impacting your clients;
- Writing articles for a business audience designed to get you hired;
- Public speaking;
- Questions for clients and potential clients;
- Active listening;
- Building the team and assigning work;
- Supervising and giving feedback.

Reading an article like this has very limited value by itself. It has to be translated into practice. If you want to get something out of the article ask yourself, "What can I do based on what I learned?" If you want to share your plan with me, I would enjoy hearing from you.