

# Lunch anyone? Developing your business and building your brand

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In most law firms, having an established book of business, or demonstrating the ability to grow a book of business, is a significant factor in determining who joins the partnership ranks. Business development is not a core focus at most law schools, though, and it is not always apparent to new lawyers that a big part of what lawyers do is, in fact, sales.

And for many lawyers, the skills required to be an excellent legal practitioner are very different from those needed to market themselves and their practice. To build a business, new attorneys must take a measured approach to using and creating networks, identifying the right business opportunities and ultimately asking for the work.

What some might not realize is that the new attorney position offers unlimited possibilities for growth and success. So then, how do new lawyers capitalize on this opportunity and learn to target specific clients and industries, distinguish their services from the competition and overcome possible obstacles and objections of prospective clients?

Savvy firms are equipping their lawyers, millennials and veteran partners with the skills necessary to turn their network of contacts into clients. More and more law firms are recognizing the value of involving their lawyers in marketing and are turning to professional coaching to arm their attorneys with the skills needed to be successful in business development.

## COACHING AND TRAINING

Many lawyers are uncomfortable with the notion of business development. They express their distaste for “selling,” yet acknowledge it is a necessary component of career success. To overcome the pre-disposed aversion to sales, business development training breaks the concept down into small, manageable action items.

Coaching provides a systematic approach that aligns business development with each attorney’s specific personality traits, skill sets and personal and professional values. Lawyers should take advantage of training and guidance their firm’s marketing team offers, or seek coaching from a marketing professional.

By focusing on targeted, concrete, smaller action steps, which usually follow a linear and logical process that resonates with

most attorneys, any lawyer can succeed in business development with the proper training.

For attorney business development coaching to be successful, the training must provide guidance and assistance in both the “process” of business development — the tactical strategies and methods — and the “soft skills” side of business development, which includes communication, relationship building and likability.

Further, business development coaching success requires accountability, consistent encouragement, practice and feedback.

## BECOMING LIKEABLE

The top business development principle — and often the hardest for attorneys to understand and adopt — is that likability is the most crucial key to business development success.

Numerous strategies and methods to approach sales can help attorneys produce results. One requirement remains constant: The lawyer must be likable to gain business, regardless of the lawyer’s level of experience or strength of reputation.

It seems hard to believe, but being likable is not a character trait one is born with. It is a skill a lawyer can learn.

Just like any other skill, it can be taught, improved upon and mastered. It is said over and over again, ad nauseam, but it is true: People do business with those they know, like and trust. Likability is the foundation of trust, and potential clients need to trust you before they will give you their business.

The failure to do what it takes to be likable — to talk about oneself in a personal, humble, engaging or compelling way — is the downfall of all attorney business development. No likability usually means no follow-up meeting and, indeed, no new clients.

Likable people know how to endear themselves to others from the start. They understand the importance of presenting themselves as genuine and willing to connect.

Since likability can be learned and honed, lawyers should aim to be a friendly and highly likable person who makes others feel comfortable, and whom everyone wants to get to know better.

Be cognizant of how you present yourself to others, and do your best to be approachable. Let your personality shine through, and

practice open communication — in both verbal and nonverbal ways.

### RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Increasing your likability is a relatively easy and practical way to build new relationships. Business development is, and always has been, dependent on building relationships.

Lawyers working on honing their likeability should start by making a list of critical relationships they wish to cultivate. For business development success, they should be systematic about developing and maintaining relationships and learn to make connections rather than contacts.

Building strong business connections does not have to be an arduous endeavor. Lawyers need only make it a priority. Managing relationships like the vital assets they are will go a long way. Become interested in your connections: Invest time, energy and effort into getting to know and understand your prospects and their businesses.

Systematically document relationship and contact details: how and where you met, conversation specifics, personal preferences, communication styles, personality attributes and the like. Make it your business to understand what is special and unique about your prospects and their business.

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### Make connections, not contacts.

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As a business developer, the more you know about people and what they are doing in their businesses, the better they will respond and relate. The better you know your connection, the better the relationship, and the more likely your connection will become your client.

### GETTING OUT FROM BEHIND YOUR DESK

Business development and networking are not interchangeable terms. Business development is ultimately relationship building to generate revenue from new business. Networking involves building a web of contacts who are useful and valuable.

If you are new to business development, it will be challenging to build a book of business if the only people you know are those you are meeting through work. You must get out of your office and meet people. This means going to events where attorneys are likely to be present, but it also means going to events or meetings where you are likely to stand out because you are an attorney.

Leaving the computer screen behind and attending, speaking at and meaningfully involving yourself in actual in-person events is critical if you want to build your network. Getting involved in an organization in a way that demonstrates competency and authority will help to develop leadership skills and a positive reputation within the community.

To benefit and derive business from networking within an organization, it is imperative to become ingrained in the group. Join a committee, routinely attend meetings, take a leadership position, engage with key members, maximize speaking opportunities and fully invest.

Often, this means a significant commitment of personal and professional time, energy and financial resources, such as membership dues and sponsorship fees.

Though it can be costly in terms of both time and money, consistent involvement in an association is a surefire way to build your reputation more quickly and boost business development efforts.

The bottom line is that regular and active participation is the key to successfully developing relationships and business opportunities.

### EFFECTIVE NETWORKING REQUIRES PREPARATION

Networking is much more than showing up, having some drinks and snacks, and handing out business cards. Networking's emphasis should be on how you can help another person — not how that person can help you. It is about connecting with people, sharing who you are and how you can assist and maybe gaining some information that you can potentially use in the future.

As lawyers, we prepare for meetings with clients, judges, opposing counsel and colleagues. In contrast, as business developers, we often walk into a networking event or meeting without a game plan or strategy.

It is important to practice good networking to succeed and overcome the perception that these events and prospect meetings are awkward. A little preparation can go a long way.

So how can you maximize the return on your time at a networking event or prospect meeting? To start, it is essential to develop and understand the goal of the event or meet-up. Before you head out to a meeting or happy hour, clearly set your intentions. Think about why you are attending, whom you want to meet and what you would like to achieve.

Without clear objectives, you will be unable to measure the success of your networking. Further, it helps to know the names of the fellow event attendees you would like to meet. You need to do some homework.

Research the people you want to get to know so you can find common ground and find a basis for initial conversations. Knowing even a few details about your contacts' personal or business life will help spark a connection. Arming yourself with information maximizes the chances your conversations will be productive and memorable.

Now you have done the research on your potential contacts and strategized for the networking event. Great. But what do you say when you get there? When it comes to developing

business relationships, it is critical to overlook the word “business” and focus on the word “relationships.”

You want each meeting to be friendly and personal, and to lay the foundation for a mutually beneficial relationship. The best business relationships usually form as the result of genuine curiosity.

Asking for advice about a topic a person is familiar with is a great way to get a connection started and to form a bond. Actively showing interest in other people is powerful. People attend events because they are social opportunities to meet new business connections, share information and learn. Actively listening to your contacts and asking them to tell you more is the quickest way to start a business relationship.

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### Asking for advice is a great way to get a connection started.

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Most importantly, when attending a networking event or meeting, focus on making one quality connection. Successful networking does not mean blanketing the room with your business card. Aim to have a single authentic conversation with someone that you like, and share ideas.

Instead of forcing yourself to talk to 10 people, allow yourself to be drawn to one person who is engaging and informative. When you have a single goal while networking — to make one quality connection — you have a metric for measuring success.

Making a connection at networking events is just the jumping-off point for starting a new professional relationship. Everyone knows the secret to effective networking is following up. This is the key to developing your relationship into one that brings in business. It stabilizes the connection.

Business development and networking follow-up must be systematic, routine and timely. It shows you are invested in developing the relationship, interested in adding value and determined to grow your connection.

When done strategically, tactfully and effectively, networking can take your business development efforts to the next level and boost your personal brand.

### AUDITING YOUR PERSONAL BRAND

Developing your brand while building your book of business is not only beneficial to career longevity; it is essential for presenting yourself as a highly competent, successful leader who is the best choice to provide legal representation.

Your personal brand comes to life in how you consistently act, promote yourself and present yourself to others. In a nutshell, your brand is how other people perceive you.

Presenting yourself effectively, in person and online, is the first step in building the mutually beneficial network of contacts needed to develop business. The way you look and act — and what information is available about you online — is a massive part of your personal brand. How you dress and act speaks volumes about you as a professional.

By actively cultivating your brand, you can help others form positive impressions of you. Thoughtfully building your brand will allow you to establish yourself as a leader in your field and connect with a broader base of potential clients. Creating a targeted and consistent brand can help you make a strong and lasting impression.

Start with your appearance. Your clothing, hair, makeup, accessories, voice, tone and posture are the initial outward-facing signals you give to those around you.

Your appearance should be purposeful and determined. The goal is to look sharp and polished. Wear sophisticated clothes that fit you well. This does not necessarily mean breaking the bank. A less expensive but clean, well-fitting outfit can make just as good an impression as a designer piece.

Practice good grooming habits. If you look and feel good, you will be more confident in your dealings with your prospects. Put some thought into what you wear and your presence, because others are forming their opinion of you based on it.

Try asking people how they would describe you if they were to recommend you to someone. Notice if they mention any elements of your presence and physical appearance. Getting feedback from others will help you identify any issues and give insight into how your brand is perceived.

In addition, review your social media profiles and see what story you are telling there. Be conscious of the digital presence you project, from the language you use to your images and graphics.

Take care to build an online presence that reinforces your in-person appearance. Someone looking you up online should see a strong positive presence that reflects your brand and expertise.

### GIVE FIRST, ASK LATER

So, will becoming likable, auditing your image and practicing effective networking bring in business immediately? Probably not. As a new business developer, don't worry — for now — about getting the work.

For people to do business with you and choose you as their attorney, you need to be a measured and strategic giver. This means phone calls, handwritten holiday cards and gifts on peoples' birthdays. It also means frequent “check-ins” and introducing them to a person in your circle who can help them in some way.

It means forwarding valuable industry-specific news, business leads or articles of interest. And it means going out of your way to provide connections with information of value and offer knowledge, access or assistance that they could not easily find otherwise.

Give without the expectation of receiving something in return. Build a smart and authentic value-add by focusing on the other person's gain rather than on your own.

Strategic giving is crucial. It is the mindset of acting like you have the business before you have the business. This may mean putting off asking for actual business for months, but it is bound to get a better response once your connection is primed to trust your instincts and acumen.

By offering this "free" value and advice, you demonstrate your knowledge and willingness to make the needs of your prospect a top priority.

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### Act like you have the business before you have the business.

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Once you have tested the relationship waters, slowly shift the connection from a prospect relationship to client partnership by showing interest in your contact and adding value. With a little push and some nurturing, a new business developer can make it happen. Take incremental action.

During subsequent meetings, slowly venture into more targeted questions about their work, what kind of stresses they deal with, or what kind of issues they face. With enough sincere probing, you will find an opening to get their buy-in. They may even begin asking for your casual advice.

Mention that you can help with those kinds of issues, or that you would be happy to introduce them to a colleague who can assist. Never underestimate the value of being a "connector" for your contacts and prospects. Introducing people in your circle to each other engenders goodwill.

You can then use this goodwill as currency. Acknowledge your role and contribution to their success, express your gratitude for being able to assist, and then ask if you could talk about access to some additional work or business. People want to help and pay back those who have helped them.

### SHAPE YOUR EFFORTS TO REFLECT YOUR LIFESTYLE

As busy professionals, attorneys often have difficulty focusing consistently on things that are important but not urgent.

This is especially true for new marketers, who usually get stuck in a vicious cycle of always trying to juggle billable hours and marketing. However, business development is a fluid art, not a hard science.

Create business development strategies that are uniquely suited to your interests and personality type. Choose marketing opportunities that fit with your lifestyle and values and reflect who you are. Incorporate business development into your personal activities. If you enjoy meeting new people, try more traditional networking events and parties.

If you prefer a more intimate setting, try taking people out for coffee or lunch. Carefully evaluate how you spend your time and effort, and then focus on the activities that will play to your strengths and lead to the highest returns.

No one is ever going to hand you the clients you need to build a business. Instead, business development is a career-long process that has its twists and turns as well as ups and downs over time. It is a long game played over several years. With a little planning, focus and persistence, anyone can succeed in business development. It is high-value work, and it should be prioritized accordingly.

The act of prioritizing business development does not bring in business. But it increases the likelihood that the time spent on business development will be productive. The personal efforts you make to develop likability, define your personal brand and grow your network throughout your career will be vital to long-term success.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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