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How You Can Build A Better Book Of Business

Law360, New York (January 4, 2016, 7:41 PM ET) -- Building a more robust book of clients is a perennial New Year's resolution for attorneys. So Law360 reached out to partners for tips to help you find new work and become a client favorite.

Jamie Alan Cole, Weiss Serota Helfman Cole & Bierman PL

"One way to obtain a sustainable clientele is to develop several long-term relationships. A 'relationship' entails far more than merely being an acquaintance or a contact. Five close relationships are worth far more than 500 Facebook 'friends' or LinkedIn 'connections.' Quality, not quantity, is the key. Developing relationships necessitates a large investment of time (nonbillable) and effort, but it is well worth it. The relationships should be mutually beneficial, and be with people who are in a position to either send legal work to you or recommend you to people who can send work to you."

Charles Caulkins, Fisher & Phillips LLP

"The easiest source of new business is developing it from existing clients. Here are five keys to doing this: 1) Be a substantively good lawyer. 2) Be efficient and cost effective. 3) Be timely and promptly return calls and emails. 4) Learn your clients' business and what affects them. 5) Always think of the client's business and legal needs and how you may be able to assist. If you are viewed as a valuable adviser, clients will trust you and consult with you on a number of matters and you will ultimately build new business."

Neil Dishman, Jackson Lewis PC

"When you meet with a potential client, if they do most of the talking, then you might get the business. If you do most of the talking, you almost certainly won't get the business. Although these are often called 'pitch meetings,' don't come in the door and start 'pitching' — i.e., immediately bragging about how great you and your firm are. Rather, ask smart questions to get your prospect talking about what their needs are and why they are open to working with you. Then, save your 'pitch' for the very end — and tailor it to the specific needs you've identified."

Todd A. Flubacher, Morris Nichols Arshrt & Tunnell LLP

"Step one is to assess where your practice fits into the marketplace and what factors drive that result. Knowing clients' perception of your practice helps you understand your competitive strengths and

weaknesses and why potential clients might call you or your competitors. Second, determine if your market position is aligned with where you want to be, find ways to address competitive weaknesses and make necessary adjustments. Third, develop a marketing strategy around your competitive strengths and the niche you fill. Above all, representing a client depends upon the client's trust and confidence. So find ways to develop solid relationships."

Julian A. Fortuna, Taylor English Duma LLP

"Tax lawyers who work primarily on business transactions often function as service partners and may not perceive a need to originate their own business. However, experienced tax lawyers have many opportunities to generate work, not only for themselves but also for their corporate partners. A key issue for the tax partner is finding the time to get 'out from under' the constantly changing tax code and regulations to become visible in the marketplace. Taking on leadership roles in the tax bar and speaking at seminars directed at in-house counsel are two of the ways I get out in the marketplace."

Seong Kim, Steptoe & Johnson LLP

"If your New Year's resolutions entail improving business development, here are my favorite tips: It's the discipline to execute that bears fruit; there is no secret formula. Make your client's goal your top priority; yes, even over your own schedules and goals. Constantly strive to improve value proposition. Value can be benefits delivered, familiarity with the clients' legal issue or industry, etc. It's not always lower price; 'better value' can mean more benefit for the same (or sometimes an even higher) price than your competitors. Practice makes perfect. Find a business development activity that you enjoy and do it frequently. Make time by getting up an hour earlier. Be good to your referral sources (some of whom will be your own law firm partners). Future referral sources are watching how you treat them."

Stella Lellos, Rivkin Radler LLP

"Value-added billing: Clients want to know that you care about them and that they are not just another client billing number. They want to know that their lawyer is a 'partner,' a 'friend' and not a billing machine. My policy is to bill for value added, not time spent. This results in clients calling with all sorts of questions, many of which require further research or action. Clients appreciate that an initial inquiry is not billable where no value was provided, and return and hire us for further action which ultimately provides value. It's a win-win for all."

Craig C. Martin, Jenner & Block LLP

"Excellent work is critical to clients. Without that, there is no reason for the client to be with you. But, equally important is understanding the clients' business and their goals, so in that regard relationships are also critical. You have to demonstrate that you can add insight and value. To do so you must listen and learn, and from this, you will have clients who benefit from not only excellent technical legal work but invaluable strategic advice."

Tom Methvin, Beasley Allen

"From a plaintiffs lawyer perspective, building a book of business involves two very important steps. First, take care of your clients. Get to know them and understand how their lives have changed since the incident that led them to you occurred. Sincere relationships will strengthen your reputation. Second, nurture relationships with co-counsel. Although our offices are in Montgomery, Alabama, our attorneys practice all over the country. It is imperative that we take great care of clients who were referred to us by our co-counsel."

Jeff Peelen, Quarles & Brady LLP

"For me, it's been a combination of really learning our firm's platform and service offerings, and taking a genuine interest in helping clients. If you're really dedicated to helping and seeing your clients succeed, you'll naturally get in rhythm with the way clients work, build meaningful relationships, find ways to make fee arrangements work, and find opportunities where your distinguishing expertise is just what's needed. Then it's a matter of consistently excellent execution. Build a track record of doing that, and clients will start recommending you and your firm."

Henry M. Quillian III, Taylor English Duma LLP

"First, ask a successful lawyer how it is done. This capitalizes on an interesting psychological fact: By asking a lawyer who has a book of business how it was built, perhaps over a breakfast or lunch meeting, an implied and unspoken contract is formed between the two individuals that induces the successful lawyer to refer legal work to the mentee. Continue these conversations with other successful lawyers and see how it works. Also, remember the basics: Answer your phone when it rings; send handwritten thank-you notes for any meaningful event; and demonstrate leadership through speaking engagements at every opportunity."

Ricky Raven, Reed Smith LLP

"Among the keys to building a substantial practice are to develop subject-matter and skill experience that makes you indispensable to the client and build client relationships so that the services you provide have a direct impact on the career trajectory of in-house counsel. In addition, you need to identify and hone the critical-thinking and problem-solving skills that are indispensable to business development, not just the skills related to the practice of law. Find a mentor on the business-development side; it is my experience that being treated like a high-potential business developer ignites your desires to elevate your activities. Develop a written, strategic business plan and stick to it, then conduct critical self-analysis related to your business-development strengths and craft your marketing to fit those perceived strengths."

Ted D. Rosen, Fox Rothschild LLP

"Be generous of your time, of your knowledge and of food and wine. Be kind. Be a good person. Be an expert. Be a writer, blogger and Twitter-er. Be a friend. Be engaging. Be wise. Be confident. Be a listener. Be a giver of good referrals. Be a leader. Be open. Be caring. Be positive. Be a joiner. Be interesting. Be smart. Be well-rounded. Be well-versed in business. Be international. Be aggressive. Be articulate."

Alexa R. Ross, Robbins Ross Alloy Belinfante Littlefield LLC

"For long-term business growth, partners need to make it worthwhile for associates to develop business. Most firms provide business-development training, which is important but only a first step. At our firm, the partners have adopted a 'money talks' approach, which has served the firm well. Each associate has a generous business-development budget for potential client entertainment and so on. In addition, each associate who brings in a client receives an origination bonus of 10 percent of collections. Last year, one associate earned a six-figure origination bonus. Talk about motivation!"

Howard Talenfeld, Talenfeld Law

"Internet marketing is a great resource for gaining new clients. I regularly post blogs, with assistance from my public relations firm, on issues that are related to my children's rights practice. Having fresh content added multiple times a week helps me rank high in Internet searches. Because children's rights is a niche market, regular blogging, combined with my background of experience in this area, makes me a 'go to' authority with referral sources, prospects and the national and local media."

C. Bradley Vynalek, Quarles & Brady LLP

"It's all about liking what you do and engaging with opportunities that are organic. You have to intrinsically connect with people and enjoy the relationship; growth will occur naturally if you are sincere about the relationship and are a constant champion for your contacts. From there, it's just about making sure you are a trusted business provider, not just a vendor."

Doug Wabner, Norton Rose Fulbright

"Try to put yourself in the shoes of your client and make the matter at hand your matter. Recognize your client's legal and business concerns, and make sure the client understands the matter is as important to you as it is to them. Be sure to keep all involved up to speed and always, always, seek their thoughts, input and guidance. Lastly, if there's one thing that will get you and keep getting you business, it's making the client, the in-house counsel, look good."

Paul Williams, Shook Hardy & Bacon LLP

"There are many ways to endear yourself to clients and be top of mind when new work is assigned. Honest hard work, creative solutions and active commitment to client service have served me well. My advice: Approach your work for each client as if they are your best client. Be available and responsive. Listen. Craft effective strategies that provide solutions. Consistently deliver quality work product and great results. Add value above and beyond the legal assignment. Price your work in a way that aligns your interests with your client's interest and delivers the expected work and outcomes at a reasonable value."

--Editing by Mark Lebetkin.