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# How Are You Investing in Business-Building Relationships?

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***"Discipline is the bridge between goals and accomplishment"*** **– Jim Rohn, international business management expert**

Some things appear to be so simple that we assume (dangerously) that everyone "gets it." Bear with me a moment.

For lawyers, it is imperative to consistently and persistently cultivate and nurture their relationships within their network; with clients, to receive more work and strengthen the loyalty bond; with referral sources, to receive more referrals; with prospects, to develop new work; and so on.

Why, then, is it that a significant number of lawyers either have no system — formal or otherwise — for getting and staying in touch with these people or do a dismal job of staying connected?

## 'Getting and Staying in Touch'?

Again, a seemingly obvious question, but in my legal marketing practice of more than 25 years, I have worked with very few lawyers who realistically understand, as a practical matter, the fundamental principle of this phrase.

It is a widely known known statistic that it takes 7-10 "touches" to achieve "top-of-mind awareness" status. Lawyers are implored to develop - often with the support of their legal assistant/marketing or IT team, a consolidated contact list including clients; industry and professional contacts; referral sources; prospects; friends and family; school classmates — law school, college, high school, etc.; co-workers and former co-workers; contacts from former clerkships; association contacts; community contacts; holiday card recipients; and so on.

Though it may be an arduous task to assemble all the business cards, old Rolodexes (yes, I'm showing my age), database printouts, etc., it is important to have all your contacts in one system. Can we say "CRM" (contact relationship management) system?

As I often relay to my clients, no list equals no connections, no communications with friends, peers, industry contacts and prospects, and, ultimately, no clients. Remember, we're in the "relationship-building" business, and it becomes much more daunting to foster relationships if we don't proactively get and stay in touch.

## What does this mean to me?

For purposes of communicating regularly with your various constituents (clients, referral sources, prospects, etc.), no one communication message will be of interest to everyone on your contact list. That is to say, if you develop an e-newsletter or legal update on the importance of developing social media policies for the workplace and send it to your human resource clients, that topic may be of little interest to your charitable organization contacts unless they are involved in employment law issues. There is great efficiency and merit to tailor your message to an intended audience and there is no better way than to develop "categories" of contacts.

When it comes to knowing how, when and how often to reach out, paramount on most attorneys' minds is that they do not want to be perceived as "too pushy" “aggressive" or otherwise annoying. Understandable. One principle I often convey to my clients is that most people are so involved in their own world, business, family, etc.; you are not capturing 100 percent of their attention most of the time. In other words, to adequately "register" on your targets' radar, there must be regular, consistent and persistent "touch points”, be they via e-mail, phone call, face-to-face contact and social media outlets. You get the point.

## Check Motivations

To build and grow a healthy practice, it is imperative to develop a system of getting and staying in touch but doing so with the appropriate mindset. In short, "It's not about you."

Lawyers often query, "What is it that I'm saying to all these people?" Lawyers sometimes say, "I don't want to bother these folks”? Understandable.

My response is usually a variation on the theme of reaching out with a service mindset and with authentic intentions of checking in on your contacts' business, seeing how they are making out with a recent transition or starting a new position, or a company move, etc. The universal sowing of seeds of goodwill will ultimately reap only good things. Or, relating another way, employing Newton's Laws of Motion, "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction." The more "goodwill" you put out, the more it will come back to you … usually multifold.

## Time Considerations

Lawyers are very busy. Where do they "find" the time to get and stay in touch with everyone and have the oft-needed downtime?

Just today, I explained to a junior partner client that, if addressed productively, his contacts will soon become his friends. Consider this: we all have certain people with whom we enjoy sharing time. What if those special individuals could be the same ones in your categorized contact lists? How cool would that be? Kill two birds with, well, you know.

Many successful senior attorneys have worked most of their professional careers to create this very scenario though it didn't happen overnight. It took years, in some cases, one contact at a time. This brings me to my next point.

## Leverage Technology

In our digital age, it has never been easier to "get and stay connected" via a host of technological tools (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, blogging). Not a technophile? No sweat; there are "people" who make a career of helping clients "connect". One such job title is "certified social media specialist".

## Net-Net

In the fiercely competitive legal services arena, cultivating strong relationships is more important than ever before. As a successful lawyer and business owner, you must find a way to get and stay in touch with your desired audiences, targeted constituents and those folks who ultimately can help you grow a healthy practice. It is most easily done by:

• Commit to making it happen.

• Seek buy-in from your support resources (internal and/or external) so everyone is on the same page.

• Develop a viable and workable system for gathering, categorizing and maintaining contacts on an ongoing basis.

• Schedule dates/calendar regular communication with your contacts in addition to the other regular "touches".

- For example, on Mondays, review last week's business development actions. Schedule in two blocks of 15-minute increments to follow up with each contact, offering something of value to them…a copy of a new relevant report, a link to an interesting article, a professional announcement of a common acquaintance.
- On Tuesdays, place three phone calls to inactive clients to check in on their status/business. Ask if there is anything with which you can help them.
- On Wednesdays, invite three referral sources to schedule a coffee in the next month. Mark your calendar and make it happen.
- On Thursdays, research upcoming targeted networking events in an industry you serve, a Bar association event and/or other relevant organization.
- On Friday, consider what concrete steps you've taken during the week and consider next steps to nurture the relationships you've cultivated. Take the afternoon off to recover from a busy week.

• Repeat.



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