

Putting the 'Be' in B.D.

Despite what many lawyers believe – or have been led to believe, business development is not an art. It's a learnable, repeatable business process. Ultimately, if you simply focus on putting the Clients first and helping them to succeed, it will improve your chances of developing business significantly. Here are a few suggestions for 'be'-coming a more effective business developer.

- 1) **Be committed.** Make business development a habit. Make it a priority to spend a little time each day learning about the Client's business and industry and a little time each week focusing on building relationships with current and prospective Clients.
- 2) **Be knowledgeable.** Make an effort to understand and appreciate the issues and business challenges that are urgent to your Clients and potential Clients and their businesses. These are where the opportunities lie.
- 3) **Be selective.** Choose the right targets. Focus on Clients and potential Clients who work for businesses and in industries that you have expertise in and who have issues and challenges that you have experience with. These are the Clients you can help.
- 4) **Be face to face with Clients.** An in-person meeting improves your chances of business development success significantly – and helps to build the long-term relationships. If you focus on the Clients and their issues, they will gladly meet with you.
- 5) **Be prepared.** Before meeting with a Client, learn as much as you can about the Client's business and industry. The focus should be on understanding and appreciating the challenges they face and helping them to find solutions.
- 6) **Be a good listener.** People want to be heard and understood. Your goal in a face to face meeting with a Client should be to ask a few insightful questions that are prepared in advance to provide insights into the individual's business goals, needs and challenges – and spend most of your time listening to the Client's responses. Don't promote or talk about your practice or your firm except to briefly answer specific questions. Keep the focus on them.
- 7) **Be polite.** Be careful not to cut off or interrupt Clients when they are speaking. Sometimes we do this without even realizing it. And when Clients are talking, focus completely on them, not on what you are going to say next. Always thank Clients for their time and let them know that it was a pleasure meeting or speaking with them.
- 8) **Be of value.** Clients gladly meet with and give work to people who bring value to the table. Try to provide value in every Client encounter. Think of ways to give before you expect to receive. Help them achieve their goals. Find solutions to their challenges. Make introductions. Provide information, research or advice for free – yes, free. When you provide value, people will remember, recommend and often reciprocate.
- 9) **Be of service.** Client service can be a key differentiator. It's also the primary reason that law firms lose Clients. It's been said that the average buyer of legal services may not be able distinguish the quality of legal services – but that same Client certainly knows when a phone call isn't returned. What's more, superlative Client service forges lasting relationships that can survive a poor result or lost case.

- 10) **Be patient.** Don't try to sell, pitch or close Clients – especially at the first meeting. Business development doesn't usually happen on the first call, or even on the second. 81% of sales are made after the 4th call. Fortunately 90% of business developers have given up by then. Be in the 10%. The goal of every encounter with potential Client is simply to agree to move forward toward a logical next step. Frequently this is something as simple as agreeing upon a specific time to follow up. Ultimately the next step will be an agreement to work together.

Remember, a sale is just the pleasant byproduct of helping a Client succeed. Just keep the 'be' in B.D. - and keep the focus on the Client. If you can do this, you will go a long way toward not only developing business, but also becoming a trusted advisor and indispensable partner to your Clients.

As a Business Development Technology Consultant, Chris Fritsch has worked together with hundreds of top law firms across the country to help them choose and implement the right technology and strategies to enhance their business development efforts and maximize their value and return on investment.

Chris also writes and speaks nationally on business development and legal technology topics. Her areas of expertise include law firm competitive intelligence, client relationship management (CRM), business development and related technology.

Chris received her law degree from Emory University School of Law in Atlanta, GA, where she served as Managing Editor of the Emory International Law Review, as well as student and faculty technology consultant.