



Week of **May 11, 2010**

A Reinforcing Dynamic of *Pro Bono* and Client Contacts

Lawyers regularly engage in many civic and charitable activities, by volunteering, serving on bar association committees and boards of nonprofit organizations, and otherwise contributing to their communities. However laudable this may be, the profitability of their firm is ultimately the determining factor in whether they can afford to do such work. If client billings are not sufficient to support *pro bono* non-billable time, the commitment to serving the public will be tenuous at best.

I was asked to coach a lawyer who had built a successful practice, but felt that it was growing so rapidly that she needed to add an associate to keep up. Together, we assessed her practice and determined that the real issue was not needing more help, but looking at her goals and firm structure objectively. Yes, the practice's revenues were growing rapidly, but they were still two to three times below the level that could support a full-time associate. The practice was not nearly as profitable as it should be because the lawyer was outsourcing too much work on a contract basis, in order to devote more time than was practical to *pro bono* projects and activities.

Ultimately, we decided that the lawyer should shift her business development and community service focus to activities where she would interact with businesspeople who would be potential sources of new business or referrals. The change recognized the practicality that the success of her practice was integral to, and not distinct from, *pro bono* work.

The issue of networking is a critical one. The fact is that every lawyer involved in *pro bono* activity has networking circles that can be expanded to serve as business development connections. In your community network, you interact with individuals who may not primarily see you as a professional service provider but who nonetheless represent potential



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clients: members of your church, members of cultural association boards, alumni association contacts and similar individuals. By contrast, your professional network includes professional referral sources who may not become clients themselves but who can refer you to their own clients. These referral sources include brokers, bankers, CPAs, consultants, financial planners and other lawyers - all of whom you may also encounter in *pro bono* activities.

Bring to these contacts the same organization and focus that you would to an investment portfolio, categorizing individuals by geographic location, by professional specialty, by activity, by personal interest. Then begin networking - the practical process of systematically expanding business development relationships by meeting and talking with them and developing the list of matters such contacts could refer to you. You may just find that you are enhancing the client development capability of your firm - at the same time as you are pursuing and enhancing your capability to pursue *pro bono* work.



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Personal Commentary

You work very hard. Be sure to include some fun in your efforts. I was reminded of this today during our periodic video shoot. I did one of the segments while seated on the bike I've set up in my office to ride when I'm tired and not willing to go out on the road and face traffic. As I sat on the bike, a smile instantly came over my entire body. Be sure to include fun in your daily regimen.

Best wishes,

Ed Poll

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