

Zen & The Art of Legal Networking

INSIGHTS & COMMENTARY ON RELATIONSHIP BUILDING WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL LAWYERS NETWORK

PUBLISHED BY

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Posted at 10:58 AM on May 27, 2011 by Lindsay Griffiths



Ask Friday! Asking for Business Edition

Today's Ask Friday! question comes from legal client/business development coach and teacher, [Cordell Parvin](#), who suggested today's post focus on "How to ask for business."

To answer this, I went back into our archives to find [LegalBizDev's Jim Hassett's](#) thoughts on this very subject. Since Jim's an expert in this, I'll give you his suggestions for how to ask for business from our [2009 webinar series](#) with links to some resources on his site (we'll start with some planning tips):

- **Selling is a numbers game** (let's say for argument's sake that "selling" isn't a bad word here). "In order to succeed, sales professionals need a lot of contacts to make a small number of sales."
- **Meet the Right People:** Jim suggests that the attorneys [start with a plan](#), which should include defining their niche, defining their ideal clients, meeting the right people, and then qualifying the prospects into who will buy, who will buy soon, and who will buy from them.

Once you have your plan in place, you can start working on getting that new business.

- **Getting Referrals:** There are four steps to getting referrals:

1. Asking at the right moment
2. Following up immediately
3. Thanking people repeatedly
4. Keeping them informed

When asking for referrals, Jim emphasized the importance of *a/ways* framing the requests in terms of the needs and desires of the people that you're asking.

- **How to cross-sell:** [Cross-selling](#) is similarly about thinking in terms of meeting the needs of the other partner at the firm and potential clients. Start by looking through your own client lists to see which clients might benefit from some of the other services the firm offers. Then, offer to share these clients with a trusted partner.

Next, aim for a few small successes, by giving the clients advice that saves them money or better meets their needs. Jim calls this "integrity-based cross-selling," a term coined by Larry Smith at Levick. According to Mark Greene of Nixon Peabody, there are four key factors to cross-selling success: communication, compensation, competence, and control.

- **Advance the Relationships:** Since less than 10% of face to face meetings lead to a decision (either positive or negative), it's important to plan what [the next advance](#) will be ("advance" being any action that moves a sale forward). Jim suggests that the attorneys plan their primary advance, their secondary advance, and [a list of questions](#) to ask before every meeting.
- **Close the Deal:** While some people think that [selling is all about closing](#), Jim likens a focus on closing to teaching a gardener how to pick tomatoes. It's more important to teach them how to grow tomatoes - then picking them is easy.

Jim adapts Robert Kimroy's tips for insurance sales into something he calls the "Zen of Selling by Not Selling," which focuses on building relationships over time. Part of this involves keeping in touch with a fair number of prospects over time, and Jim suggests that attorneys aim for quarterly contact with their prospects to stay top of mind.

Newsletters are one option for this, but Jim says that the best systems require little lawyer effort, provide value, and most importantly, are personal to the recipient.

Jim also has [some great advice](#) on selling to existing clients.

Thanks to Cordell for his great suggestion!

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