

## [Open Up During the Holiday Season](#)

November 29, 2011—posted by [Stephen Seckler](#), President, Seckler Legal Consulting and Coaching



Originating business requires the ability to look a prospect in the eye and confidently tell them that you can solve their legal problem. In sales parlance, you need to be able to “close” business if you want your practice to grow.

In order to close, however, you first need to learn how to “open up” conversations. You need to find out what problems your contacts are trying to solve (both in their businesses and in their personal lives) and you need to offer solutions. This only happens when you approach relationship building in a very open ended way. For many lawyers I meet, this is very challenging. But the holiday season is a good time to practice.

The holiday season may not be the best time of the year to “close” legal work; but the month of December is a great time for relationship building. And since most legal work flows from good relationship building (whether it is with existing clients, prospective clients or referral sources), this is actually a great time of year for marketing. It is a time of year to cultivate and “open up” relationships.

For attorneys who do not consider themselves that social (and who thrive on having a full plate of legal work), December may feel downright depressing. If you fall into this category, you may be thinking a flurry of negative thoughts: *I hate holiday parties. What am I supposed to talk about anyway? It's hard to stay energized about marketing when I'm really slow. No one is going to retain me until after the New Year anyway.*

With a different mindset, however, the holidays can give you an excuse to connect with people in your network. The holidays give you more opportunities to find ways that you can be helpful to your contacts. This in turn can help keep you “top of mind” with important prospects and referral sources.

So what are some good ways to “open up” conversations during the holidays. Here are a few tips:

- Send gift baskets or similar gifts to anyone you really want to thank. For less than \$100, you can make a lot of support staff happy and your gift will be noticed by the person you are trying to influence.
- You do not have to attend holiday parties (unless the host would be truly hurt). If you really hate going to parties, use the holiday season to get caught up over breakfast, lunch or coffee. Offer to treat. Everyone likes to be treated.
- If you do decide to attend some parties, focus on parties where you will know a few people already.
- Go with the mindset that you are simply there to listen and learn.
- Come prepared with a few things to talk about (i.e. things that you think might be of interest to the people you expect to meet). Good topics include: a recent matter you helped a client with, interesting cases you are working on, a trip you are planning to take, a non-profit cause you are working with, something interesting you read about their industry, an interesting movie you saw or book you can recommend. Don't plan to give a monologue. But having a few topics queued up will make it easier to get the conversation flowing. Avoid politics unless you are sure the individual agrees with your political views (then by all means, make fun of your least favorite Presidential candidate).
- Spend 80% of your energy asking open ended questions and listening. This is true whether you are at a holiday party or sitting down over lunch.
- Ask about holiday plans, family, outside interests as well as questions about the person's business. Look for ways to be helpful. Maybe their child is applying to college at your alma mater and you can offer to talk to the child. Maybe they are thinking about a good movie to go see. Give them your suggestions. Find out who they want to meet for their own marketing. Perhaps they need a referral for a contractor to fix their front porch or a new accountant to replace the disorganized accountant they have been using. Perhaps they share your interest in basketball and would enjoy seeing the Celtics play (if the season ever starts—in which case you can invite them to a game.)

You will not know what someone likes or needs until you ask. So this holiday season, do a lot of asking and you will undoubtedly learn about ways you can be helpful to the people in your network. This, in turn, will build your business relationships and over time, will give you more opportunities to be a solid “closer”.