

## **SALES OR BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT—DOES IT MATTER?**

In law firms, and all other professional service firms, we must get over our irritability and disdain for the word “sales.” If we spent half the energy we spend on complaining about the horrid practice of “sales” on actually implementing a plan on how to develop business and sell, which is really just communicating with our potential/clients, we would be amazed at the results.

Call it whatever you want, but please get over worrying about what it’s called. It doesn’t matter. What does matter is the process of developing business, of strategically defining and targeting your clients, then listening to and talking to them to determine whether or not you can help them solve their problems.

Why am I qualified to say this? I can say this because I started my career in sales with a national company called L. M. Berry & Company. Before I was ever allowed in front of clients, and after one week of district office training on paperwork (now that was painful!), I was sent away for two weeks of intense sales training to learn how to solve clients’ problems with the solutions we provided.

It was an amazing experience. We were taught how to interview the clients we were meeting face-to-face with, how to learn about their business, how to ask questions about how they work. This happened to fit in perfectly with my personality because I am already wired as a naturally inquisitive person. I want to know about my clients’ and friends’ businesses, not necessarily because I want to sell my services to them, but because I am hungry to learn.

We would then go away and develop a solution for our clients, which we would then present at another time. What resulted was an educated, informed marketing program that fit the needs that came straight from their mouths and minds. This is the very basis of sales!

I am extremely thankful for this training as it is the foundation of the skills I have been able to share with my clients for all these years.

In the years since that first job, I’ve had other sales positions, but 22 years ago I graduated to the umbrella discipline of marketing, of which sales is a component. I’ve been able to take the parts of that sales training, combine it with all other components of marketing, traditional and new, and adapt it to what should be an integrated sales approach,

or one that serves to help fulfill a firm's marketing and growth strategy from all angles.

Sales is not the "create a one-stop shopping, include everything brochure" that you ask your marketing department to come up with before your first meeting.

It's not the annoying "don't give up until you hear no twice from your clients" approach.

It's not the "get in and out in 20 minutes with a sale or your fired" approach.

It's probably not what most of you have running around in your minds.

Then what is it? It is simply meeting with your potential/clients to find out about their business, to find out what their goals are, what product they make, what service they sell, what the biggest roadblocks are to fulfilling the delivery of their product or service, what their personality type is, how they think their clients might describe them, and so much more. It's about listening.

Then it's spending time simply but masterfully defining what your firm can do to make their lives easier, to fulfill their needs, to keep them safe, to do what you do in the most coordinated manner possible so it makes sense to them.

Let's not make it any more difficult than it needs to be. More important than that is to stop worrying about whether the process is called business development or sales, or what the difference is between those two terms. Don't use a lack of understanding, or the fear of failure in the sales process, as an excuse to hold you back from finding clients whose needs you and your firm were born to solve.

Nancy Myrland, President, Myrland Marketing, is a Professional Marketing Advisor with more than 20 years experience in partnering with clients to build their business by strengthening their relationships with their clients so they become more profitable. She is innovative, passionate, loyal, strategic, wise, and has a depth of knowledge to share with clients that comes from working in sales and business development, in marketing in corporate America with Time Warner, law firms and other professional services, higher education, business not-for-profits and membership associations.

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