

What to Do When Your Own Partners Won't Refer You

By Larry Bodine, Esq. is a business development advisor based in Tucson, AZ, and Glen Ellyn, IL. Larry is an editor of *Originate!* – the business development newsletter for lawyers at www.pbdi.org/originate. With the Apollo Business Development Program, he has helped law firms nationwide get new clients and generate millions of dollars of new revenue. He can be reached at 630.942.0977 and www.larrybodine.com.



Cross-selling is an elusive goal for law firms. The idea is simple: to interest clients that are using one practice area in using a second or third area. But the devil is in the details and most cross-selling plans fail as soon as they meet one of several common objections. As a result, to paraphrase Mark Twain, everyone talks about cross-selling, but nobody is doing anything about it.

Yet cross-selling is more important than ever. According to research by the BTI Consulting Group in Boston, corporations in the Fortune 1000 list are using 20% fewer core law firms than they did a year earlier. This means that fewer law firms will get the available work, and they will likely be the firms that successfully cross-sold their practices.

I received the following question from a lawyer at a very large law firm in Chicago who attended one of our Apollo Business Development web seminars entitled, “What Do I Say to Prospective Clients to Win Them Over?”

“Larry - I had one follow up question for you from the Webinar last Thursday and this may sound like a stupid question, however, it has been a real issue at my firm. Perhaps your experience at Sidley will be helpful, although perhaps my issue is just a cultural issue or a long ingrained course of conduct that has developed at my firm over the past 5 decades.

“I am a real estate partner. The Chicago office of my firm has long been dominated by our labor and employment practice group, although in the past seven years, our real estate group has grown to more than 120 attorneys nationally. The labor & employment partners export virtually no real estate business to our practice group notwithstanding that they represent companies with substantial real estate needs. The long standing claim is that they deal with the HR departments and, because real estate is typically handled by the "C-suite" (CEO, CFO, General Counsel or other Facilities Dept), they have no one to introduce us to.

“If step 1 is getting to the real estate decision makers, how do you suggest that I get my labor & employment partners to assist me in this effort when they don't know the decision maker and have years of experience in *not* doing this. Any thoughts would be much appreciated. Historically, this has not been a huge issue as our real estate group has been primarily self-sufficient, although in this economy, it makes no sense to perpetuate the errors of the past.”

Here's my reply:

Speaking as a lawyer myself, when I try to persuade other lawyers, I use data.

I suggest your accounting department create a spreadsheet as follows:

- The rows are labor and employment clients.
- The columns are the practice areas of your firm, including real estate.
- Each cell contains the dollars billed to each client in that area.

Wherever there is an empty cell, there is a cross-selling opportunity. I've attached a sample with the law firm name redacted. This shows how much money the firm is "leaving on the table" by failing to cross sell. IT's a compelling data when you show it to firm management.

Client	Practice Group					
	Litigation	Securities	Corporate	Regulatory	Employment	Grand Total
Wal-Mart	\$\$\$\$	\$	\$\$\$	\$\$\$	\$\$\$\$	\$\$\$\$,\$\$\$
Abbot Labs	\$\$\$\$	\$\$\$\$	\$\$\$	\$\$\$	\$	\$\$\$\$,\$\$\$
Exxon	\$	\$\$\$	\$	\$\$\$\$	\$\$\$\$	\$\$\$\$,\$\$\$
Ford	\$\$		\$\$\$			\$\$,\$\$\$
AT&T		\$\$\$\$				\$\$\$\$
Hewlett-Packard	\$\$	\$		\$		\$\$,\$\$\$
IBM	\$\$\$		\$		\$\$	\$\$,\$\$\$
Valero Energy	\$\$					\$\$

If a labor &

employment lawyer doesn't know the real estate decision maker:

- You should set up a lunch with labor & employment lawyer and his contact at the client.
- At the lunch, get to know the labor & employment decision maker. The idea is not to "push" yourself onto the client, but to inquire (off the clock) about the client's business and explore their real estate activities (you should do some homework ahead of time to know what those activities are).
- Inquire who the real estate decision maker is (ask your marketing director or librarian to look up the name of the GC and CEO in advance).
- Ask the client to introduce you to the real estate decision maker.

There is no excuse for a partner to fail to introduce another partner to a client. Clients are firm assets to be exploited firmwide. A client should not be a part of a partner's personal book of business. In my opinion, partners have an affirmative duty to cross-sell their partners, and should be rewarded or penalized accordingly at their annual compensation review.