

A Majority of Firms Offer Business Development Training to Lawyers

By **Larry Bodine**, a Business Development Advisor with a nationwide practice. He has helped 250+ law firms generate new revenue by devising strategies, conducting business development retreats and individually coaching attorneys. He can be reached at www.LarryBodine.com and 630.942.0977.



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After cutting costs to the bone, law firms must now increase revenue to remain profitable, and what most firms choose to do is train their lawyers in business development. In response to the continuing bleak economic news for the legal profession, **smart law firms are training their lawyers to bring in new business**. Research by Robert Half Legal has found that 83% of law firms offer formal sales and business development training to their lawyers.

"A rising level of new income solves all sorts of problems," said a law firm managing partner in California, where I conducted a one-year sales training program (see <http://bit.ly/dNwIGp>).

The findings were confirmed by the "Future Law Office" report by Robert Half Legal recruiters (see <http://bit.ly/fNNkOj>). Its research found that law offices have pursued various strategies for enhancing their team's focus on client service. Lawyers surveyed by Robert Half Legal said the most effective techniques for improving service levels include mentoring and/or coaching (91 percent), technology training (87 percent), business development training (83 percent), leadership training (63 percent) and



continuing legal education (2 percent).

"Who needs a trainer?"

Many self-made successful lawyers take pride in their own self-reliance. "Who needs a

trainer?” they ask.

The answer is that a majority of lawyers do. NFL quarterbacks and PGA golfers have a trainer. Elite athletes and elite lawyers have trainers. Even Little League teams have trainers. Who needs a trainer? You do.

The lawyers who benefit most from business development trainers include:

- **Junior partners who want to be equity partners.** They need to learn how to bring in business for the firm to advance their careers.
- **Senior associates who want to become partners.** Worker bees don't make partners. Closers make partner.
- **Complacent senior partners.** I've seen white-haired lawyers rekindle the old business development tactics that made them a success to begin with, and bring in new files by the armload.

These three categories describe 65% of all lawyers, based on research about lawyer personalities. Rainmakers make up the top 10% of lawyers, and we can learn from them. “Service partners” and “library lawyers” who don't want deal with clients make up the bottom 25%, and trainers are wasted on them. But everyone else who is motivated to have their own clients can benefit from sales training.

Four critical roles

A business development trainer will serve four critical roles for a lawyer, all of which our 65% of go-getters need:

1. **Structure.** Lawyers live by rules, regulations and statutes -- and we like structure. However, many people find it difficult to self-impose organization upon themselves, and a trainer will assure that a business development plan is charted out with specific goals and all the steps to achieve them.
2. **Specific Activities.** No lawyer wants to make an error, and a trainer will guide a lawyer away from embarrassing sales mistakes. That said, many lawyers don't know where to begin, and a trainer will suggest specific new-business activities based on the personality of the lawyer.
3. **Overcoming obstacles.** Many lawyers are detail-oriented and suffer from “paralysis by analysis.” They plan endlessly and never take actions. They will get hung up on how to invite someone to lunch (I am not kidding). Most lawyers have difficulty asking for a client's business without seeming aggressive or predatory. These are common sales obstacles, and a trainer will offer practical steps and the right words to say.
4. **Accountability.** Even lawyers with sincere intentions will fail to execute when it comes to business development. Left to themselves, lawyers will succumb to the pressure to bill hours, and use it as an excuse to say they have no time for business

development. But it's amazing how things change when lawyers know that a trainer is going to call and check up on them. Follow-up by a trainer is essential to a lawyer's success in business development.

Of course, you can go it alone. Notice how well that works for loners who don't take anyone else's advice. Or you can count the number of home runs hit by a baseball slugger who has a trainer to show him how to stand, the right way to hold the bat and the exact instant when to swing.

For more on this topic, call:

Larry Bodine, Esq.

Business Development Advisor

Tel: 630.942.0977

E-mail: Lbodine@LawMarketing.com

Web: <http://www.LarryBodine.com>

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- Training lawyers at firm retreats.
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