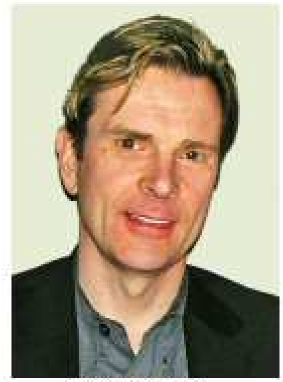
Pieces of Gold: What to Do When You Get a Business Card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I know where you keep your business cards. They're in little piles on your desk, buried under other papers, just where you left them when you returned from that recent conference or event. Or in the drawer where you tossed them so you can find it right when you need it.

You've created a junkyard of information – a business development disaster. Instead you need to realize that the moment you receive a person's business card you've obtained a piece of gold. Why?

- It can mark the beginning of a relationship that will bring you new clients and fees.
- It can be a valuable addition to your network of referral sources sending you legal work from pre-screened clients.
- It can be the moment you meet someone you can introduce to another valuable contact and create a mutually beneficial joint venture.

Don't treat a business card like a scrap of paper. Be intentional about your business development and be meticulous in your record-keeping. By the time you have 4,000 or 5,000 records in your contact list, you'll be sitting on a hilltop of gold.

Step One: The Golden Moment

When you get the person's card, stop and read it. Take a few seconds. Notice the person's title and comment on it. If it's clever or unusual in any way, make a point of it. Some people spend hours designing their business cards and will appreciate it if you notice. Check if it lists the person's cell phone number; you may need it one day. Make certain you get the person's website URL and email address if it's not on the card.

As your conversation closes, turn the card over and write the date on the back of the card, where you are, and what you talked about. Make sure to note any follow-up promises you made. You must write this information down, because I assure you you'll have completely forgotten it by the time to return to the office. Moreover, doing so is flattering to the person who gave you the card, because you've made the receipt of the card an event. You took time to make it important.

Step Two: Starting Your Data Bank

Either you or your assistant must immediately enter the information into your Outlook Contacts list. The most important part is the Notes box: type in what you wrote down on the card. In the future you will be adding information in this box as you learn the contact's family names, favorite interests, dislikes and avocations.

The reason the information must go into Outlook Contacts is because it is *searchable and sortable.* Unless you have a photographic memory, and I'm betting you don't, the person's name may escape you, but you'll remember the company where they worked or the event where you met. To find the person, all you need to do is enter key words into the "Search Contacts" box and bingo: you've found them. This will be very important when you have thousands of contacts. If you keep cards in a desk drawer or a stack with a rubber band around it, you can't do a search like this.

Suppose you are flying to New York and want to contact other people when you arrive. Simply type in "New York" in the Search Contacts box and only those contacts will display on the screen. The same goes if you are searching for all your contacts at a particular company, or everyone you met at a particular event.

Whatever you do, don't rely on your memory for this information. Relationship building can take a long time. Frequently I get a voicemail message from someone, say "Cindy," who doesn't leave her last name, mentions that we talked six months ago, and is now ready to proceed with the matter we discussed. Cindy might even forget to leave her phone number and caller ID hasn't captured it. If I were relying on my memory, I'd come up blank. But instead I go into contacts and search every "Cindy" I've met or type in appropriate keywords and I instantly find her. Now I can phone her back and pick up where we left off, as if it were yesterday.

Step Three: Forming a Relationship

Your goal now is to develop a relationship, and you need data to do this. The reason rainmakers are successful is that they have more relationships than other lawyers; new business comes in through relationships. The key to a successful business relationship is knowing a lot about the other person.

So find out and record:

- **Names of family members and the ages of their children.** Record dates when babies are born, birthdates and dates when their relatives die. These are major events in the other person's life and you need to know about them.

- **Interests.** My favorite salesman learned that I liked to go on roller coaster rides with my son. Every time a new roller coaster opened, he sent me a note or email about it. I just loved it. Your business development can thrive from adding such a *personal* component to the business relationship. You can only do this if you know the other person's avocations, vacation destinations, books they read, movies they like, favorite dessert, you name it.
- **Job changes or new degrees earned.** Always write down the date a person got a new job and keep a record on where they worked before. Job changes are major events in a person's life. If a person got a certification or advanced degree, record that as well; this represents years of effort on their part.
- **Business "trauma."** I saved this for last for emphasis. The key to getting new business is knowing what challenges someone faces in their business and "what keeps them up at night." Make note of personal career challenges, competitors who are troublesome to the company, setbacks and downturns in the industry, new products or services they're introducing, This is how you distinguish yourself as a lawyer. Not by your credentials or experience, but by demonstrating knowledge of the other person's needs.

Step 4: Linking Them In

If you haven't already, go to http://www.linkedin.com/ and create a profile about yourself. It's free. Then immediately invite your contact to be in your network. This is especially important when you meet journalists, prospects and prominent individuals. Inviting a person into your network is as easy as clicking buttons on a website and it shows that you're hip, modern, and even tech-savvy. I have 247 connections so far that link me to 2,287,400 other people.

If someone invites you to be in their LinkedIn network, accept it. Ignore invitations from Spoke, Plaxo, Pulse, Facebook, MySpace or the other online social networks. Then learn how to use LinkedIn to get clients and make money, by:

- Running searches of companies you'd like to represent
- Requesting introductions from your own contact network to the individuals you want to me.
- Sending a question to your contact list, such as, "I am planning a seminar on issues facing food manufacturers. What are the hot issues you like me to discuss?"

In life, and in the marketing of a law practice, who you know is more important than what you know. And it all starts with that golden moment when someone puts a business card in your hand.