

Generating Leads by Finding Buyers in Trouble

By Larry Bodine, Esq., a business development advisor based in Glen Ellyn, IL and Tucson, AZ. He helps law firms get new clients and earn more revenue, and has helped law firms nationwide get more clients and generate more business. He can be reached at 630.942.0977 and www.larrybodine.com.



I can now resolve the centuries-old debate among philosophers as to whether the irresistible force can overcome the immovable object. The answer is: the immovable object wins.

In this case the irresistible force is a lawyer looking for business. The immovable object is the *unwilling* prospective client. No matter much talent, experience and charisma you have, you can't make the prospect buy what they don't want to.

Professional and other services are not *sold*, they are *bought*. You can't sell something that the other person doesn't want. Hence, the most effective way to detect a lead is to find someone *ready to buy*.

An insurmountable objection

I'm reminded of my early training in the mean streets of door-to-door encyclopedia sales. I was in my 20s and eager to learn how to overcome objections. The sales trainer told us how to defeat the customer who said that he couldn't afford our encyclopedia ("We offer super-low payments!") or that they preferred a different encyclopedia ("Our encyclopedia is better!"). Then the trainer's face darkened. He said ominously that there was only one objection that could not be overcome.

"The customer says they don't *want* it."

No incentive, no discount and no guilt trip can overcome this immovable objection. I took the lesson to heart and have employed it since – as both seller and buyer. It came in very handy when I was cornered once by time-share salespeople. After feeding me a chicken lunch and offering me fabulous discounts to condos at beautiful locations, they were *astounded* and *angry* that I wouldn't buy. Here was the objection that got me out of the trap:

"I don't *want* a time-share." They let me go.

Looking for buyers

To generate leads you first need to identify prospects who are likely buyers. Don't necessarily look for the celebrated company that is topping the charts. Instead, you should seek out prospects who have business problems. For example, litigators should think of companies being sued – or threatened with suits – by:

- a) **Their customers.** Think of companies that sell toothpaste with dangerous ingredients or sell lead-painted toys.
- b) **Their employees.** Think of companies who fire pregnant women and overlook minorities in promotions.
- c) **Their investors or shareholders.** Think of companies that don't make their quarterly numbers because they are besieged with litigation.

Don't necessarily look for happy executives glowing in their own success. Instead, seek those who are frustrated in their careers, whose goals to move up the hierarchy have been thwarted, and whose dreams of a thriving business have not materialized.

Your targets are companies in *trouble*, and their executives who feel business trauma that keeps them up at night. They need professional help. They need you.

Prompting for trauma

Then, to generate work from those leads, you need to put yourself *face-to-face* with these potential buyers, discovering their specific business trouble, need and trauma. You may presume that a company or executive is in trouble, but you can't remotely confirm their willingness to buy from you.

You have to do this face-to-face. It doesn't work by email, letter or fax. It can be done over the phone, but only if you already have a relationship with the other person. The reason is that, so far, scientists have not found anyone on earth who can actually read other people's minds. The only way to find out what's on someone's mind is to *ask them questions*. This is the key to turning leads into clients.

Three quick stories:

1. An attorney I worked with was recently at a conference of potential clients, giving a talk about the latest trends in the high tech industry. One in-house counsel at the back of the room kept asking questions. She complained that she had repeatedly tried to convince her company to respond to the trends, but no one would listen to her. She was talking about her business trauma – she was likely a lead whom the lawyer could help. Later at the group dinner, over prime rib and buttered broccoli, the attorney made a point of sitting next to the woman in-house counsel and asked her just to tell more about her troubles. As she poured her heart out, the attorney knew he was hearing intense business trauma. The in-house counsel needed to muster the expertise she and the lawyer could bring. They talked about how they'd change the executives' minds by working together.
2. Another attorney recently eating lunch with a banking colleague he'd known for 15 years. They had great rapport and respect for each other, but the colleague had never sent the lawyer any work so they hadn't talked much business recently. All of a sudden it came out. The colleague started complaining about the new hires at his division, two younger and energetic officers brought in at his level. His superior seemed to be overlooking his years of service and dedication. The attorney heard his colleague's business trauma. He

asked more about what pressures were on the division, and realized how they could help each other, through a mutual set of introductions and a joint educational conference. The colleague was a lead the lawyer could help. “I have an idea that will make you look like a star. I can help *you* make the division more successful and ensure you get the credit,” he told the colleague. “Would you like to work together on it?”

3. A Midwestern attorney got some great PR, when a trade journal published an article about the lawyer’s work with a real estate company. The lawyer’s work gave the real estate company an edge over its competitors and a quick \$2 million added profit. Pretty soon the prospective clients were *calling the lawyer* on the phone! One company executive said he read the article and was impressed. “What made you call me about this *right now?*” the attorney asked simply. The executive described how his company had failed to grow, was losing out on projects that other firms seemed nimbler at getting. The lawyer heard the executive’s business trauma. They started working the next day.

The common denominator in all these examples is that the lawyers were, first of all, in a position to hear about business trauma. But they didn’t just *listen*; they *probed* a bit around the trouble and asked “*where does it hurt?*” They knew this method was working when the prospective clients began talking about their troubles. Of course, in all these cases, the attorney knew the industry and was familiar with the business of their prospects. As a result, they could ask intelligent questions and understand better what was going on with the prospect. But, beyond the legal expertise, they just needed to be ready with responsive questions so they could flush out pain. They *prompted* a conversation about the trauma and the willingness to relieve it.

This is how you find prospects who are ready to buy. Don’t focus solely on the dozens of happy-go-lucky prospects who don’t want what you have to sell. Be like a Boy Scout or a Girl Scout: look for an old lady who needs help crossing the street. And help her.