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Just Return the Calls

I was speaking to a group of litigators at the [Litigation Counsel of America's](#) spring conference in Laguna Beach. The topic of my presentation focused on how PR can help build a successful law practice. Because I was talking to a group of experienced litigators who most likely had worked on high profile cases, I knew that media relations was a topic of interest. So, when asked whether any of the attendees had worked with the media, about 75 percent of litigators had raised their hands. I took the time to offer some important advice that sometimes, even my clients forget: Return a reporter's phone call, even if you can't talk on the record.

I always say that building relationships with the media is like building relationships with clients or potential clients. It takes time to develop trust. It takes time to understand each other's needs and how to work together. And remember, it's not all about you. You can build trust by providing value, whether providing information for a story or referring another source that can go on the record.

Recently, a client filed a big case and it attracted media attention. He got calls from the [AP](#), [Bloomberg](#) and [Reuters](#), based on the public company involved. The attorney later told me that he didn't call the reporters back.

Litigators, either from a defense or plaintiff's firm, can take advantage of media opportunities, even if they can't go on the record. It goes a long way if an attorney calls the reporter back (especially before their deadline) to provide insight in the case or offer other sources. And, it might even help the client's case if the attorney helps the reporter understand the details of the filing, court proceedings or a decision. It makes for a better story anyway. Many times, litigators are upset that the 'other side' got a chance to tell their side of the story. Complaints often come in when the reporter got the facts of the case wrong or the story angle was way off base. Building a relationship with a reporter may not benefit you now, but it will in the long run when you need to call them due to the client's interest in telling their story in the court of public opinion.

Most reporters are generalists, and many times, they are young and inexperienced in the area of law. You can't fault them for that. But, you can play a role in helping them be more successful in their jobs and stories if you **JUST RETURN THE CALL!!**