

# The Five Biggest Business Development Mistakes

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If you really want to generate new business for yourself and your firm, you must avoid the tactics of a used car salesman wearing a pink tie trying to sell you a pink VW.

Nobody likes to be sold to. Nobody wants to hear you talking about yourself. Nobody wants to hear about what you're selling.

What clients and potential clients want is a lawyer who will listen. Clients want to talk about their favorite subject: themselves. They want a person they can trust to talk about their business or individual challenges.

Yet many lawyers blunder in a new business by talking about their accomplishments, the firm's history and the firm's practice groups. To succeed in business development, a lawyer must avoid making the five biggest business development mistakes:



1. **Talk, rather than listen.** If you hear the sound of your own voice at a sales call, you are making a mistake. Your goal is to ask intelligent questions and get the other person talking. They will tell you about their business issues. All you need to do is to listen for an opportunity to help.
2. **Selling your capabilities and expertise.** Sure, you are smart, went to a great law school, got some honors, belong to many bar associations and have a great track record. So what? So do most other lawyers. Clients presume you have good enough credentials or you wouldn't be at the meeting. But getting the sale comes not from *pitching* the target about how great you are, but from *asking questions* about their legal needs, so that you can help them.
3. **Presume instead of ask questions.** Simply because you've done a client's work for 10 years doesn't mean you'll keep it. A new CEO or GC could arrive on the scene, who will bid out all the legal work including yours. Or a major cost-cutting effort could start at the client corporation, and it could be aimed at legal costs. Always inquire about "what's

new" at the company and follow up with questions like "tell me more about that" and "what makes you say that?"

4. **Failure to get all the information to win the business.** Your revenues from the client could be increasing, but your "share of wallet" could be going down. Ask the client what their total legal budget is and determine your percentage of it. Ask the client what other law firms they work with and why. Ask the client how the decision is made to hire a law firm. (Your contact may not be the decision maker.)
5. **Missing out on having the client "write the proposal."** If you ask the right questions, the client or target will spell out for you exactly what they want. Back at the office you can have your notes transcribed into a proposal. The trick is to ask the right questions: ask why the legal matter is coming to a head *right now*. Ask what difference this matter makes to the firm's bottom line. Inquire, "If everything worked out perfectly, what would that look like?" Ask, "What have you tried before? Why didn't that work?" Probe, "If the decision were up to you, what would you do?" Ask, "Who's in charge of the project, and tell me about your role in it?" Finally, inquire what other law firms the company is talking to and what the deadline is for choosing a law firm.

Remember, if the other person is talking, *you* are selling.

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