

Breakthrough Thinking: How to Discover and Drive Motivation in Business Development and Lead Attorneys to Greater Prosperity

by Kimberly Rice

Why are some lawyers successful in generating a healthy client base and others struggle? Despite all the strategic planning CMOs may devote to individual attorney coaching and training, it is often not enough to support the lawyer client in connecting the dots of relationship building, reputation enhancing and contact management over the course of a career to make a remarkable difference.

In my years of working with and for law firms, first as an in-house CMO and since 2008 as a business owner of a legal marketing advisory firm, I have searched for the proverbial carrot that will motivate and propel lawyer clients to “drink the kool aid” of taking a “consistent, persistent massive amounts of action over a prolonged period of time” approach to building a prosperous business.

No matter how many ways I have sliced and diced the non-negotiable marketing tactics, which must be in play, I've returned to the same conclusion: the lawyer must be motivated to make this happen for him- or herself, for it is only then that they will prioritize and carve out the time that is required. And, let's not sugarcoat it: building a prosperous business requires a substantial time commitment over many years, even decades, to truly realize the fruits of their labor.

With that thought in mind, I researched the concept of motivation: what motivates some people and not others; how most people are motivated; is motivation derived only externally or only internally, or a mix of both and why? What I learned is instructive to help our lawyer clients address and more effectively manage their business development commitments and, thus, their long-term success.

What Drives Motivation

Several years back, in a multi-year study, researchers at the Harvard Business School interviewed 600 C-suite managers from dozens of different companies across the United States to rank the impact of five factors that are typically associated with motivation - recognition, incentives, interpersonal support from managers and colleagues, clear goals and a sense of making progress. Among these five indicators, recognition for good work was ranked as the single most important driver of motivation. Interesting. How might we apply that to the law firm setting?

When we work with our lawyers on a marketing project, perhaps a webinar series or a multi-city client seminar, how can we make assignments that only the lawyers can complete to further the initiative and build in milestones for recognition? They know the clients better than we do. They know the topic substance likely better than we do. What benchmarks can we as law firm leaders put in place to recognize the attorney once she has completed? Perhaps it may be for the attorney to reach out to a half dozen clients to offer a CE seminar for their managers on a timely employment topic.

Agreeing to a deadline by which the outreach will be complete can set the stage for recognition, once the attorney has confirmed she has communicated with her clients. As anyone who has worked to build audiences

for marketing events, this is no small undertaking so recognition is in order if the lawyer can report back that she has a number of client commitments to attend the CE seminar and perhaps even bring several colleagues along.

We can take a page from this same *Harvard Business School* study. Researchers mobilized a focus group of C-level managers and assigned them the task of emailing the research leader at the end of each day for 10 days documenting their motivation for the day (on a scale of 1 to 5), their emotional level (positive and negative), and their enthusiasm level. In doing so, the individuals participating in the focus group were asked to indicate what happened during the course of the day that contributed to that level of positive or negative motivation. The researchers found that the number one factor, by far, that drove motivation was maintaining a sense of progress - - 76% of the time. Wow, how revealing and enlightening.

When the folks in the study reported that they had had one of their best days, they also reported (three quarters of the time) that they felt they were making considerable progress, which contributed to their high motivation level. Conversely, when they had one of their worst days, when they felt the least motivated, they highly correlated this situation with a setback in connection with moving forward.

There are some important implications to this research in connection with how we as legal marketing professionals and law firm leaders can help our lawyers get and stay motivated with their business development endeavors.

How to Manage and Keep Lawyers Motivated

When working to support and assist our lawyer clients' marketing efforts, we need to ensure that unintentionally we (and/or the marketing department) are not obstacles to progress. We need to be consistent and clear in the direction we give with respect to what specifically we/our department will do for the lawyers and what we expect them to do on their own and to provide our clients with the tools that they need (current promotional materials and products; updated BI on significant clients, etc.).

Beyond that, we need to find ways to recognize and acknowledge progress. In the research study, it wasn't that recognition was not important; it was. The problem with recognition is that it is challenging to recognize people constantly each and every day. We can't make recognition work for us every day the way we can acknowledge progress every day.

For example, an exercise we use with some of our coaching clients is to ask them to take 30 seconds at the end of their workday to jot down three things that they accomplished that day that they feel positive about. It could be a simple task such as sending a follow-up email to a networking partner or inviting a referral source out for coffee. We all know it is the consistent, persistent steps that we and our lawyers take each and every day that will bring them the prosperity they so crave.

Another exercise we support occurs in group settings, whether that be in practice group meetings or in coaching roundtables. We go around the table, ask each team member to name three marketing-oriented tasks they want to accomplish that day, even if it is, again, simple tasks such as researching a targeted prospect on LinkedIn.

Once everyone has had an opportunity to voice the top three marketing tasks they intend to act upon that day, we circulate the list among the group via email. The next morning, the group leader will send a follow-up email to the group checking in on how everyone made out with their list.

Two significant things have happened as a result of this exercise: first, the three tasks have been done because of the accountability and peer pressure created. Second, even if the lawyers had a tough day, they felt better because they were seeing clear signs of progress. When we think of how to motivate lawyer clients to get and stay connected with their network; to make regular visits to their VIP clients or even send a thank you note to a referral source, we can extrapolate the goodwill and crucial relationship building (and perhaps more work generated) that will occur if they take these simple steps. Sometimes, they just can't see the bigger picture when client demands and court schedules are clouding the way.

As we learned about the role of the top five motivating factors, certainly don't ignore recognition or incentives, if they prove to be effective motivating factors for your clients. However, more importantly, focus on ensuring your lawyers are regularly reminded of the clear progress that they are making, each and every day. Don't overlook the importance of acknowledging and pointing out the clear signs of progress lawyers are making, as a strategy to prompt and drive motivation.

What we have seen is that when business building becomes a part of lawyers' daily routines and, as importantly, embedded into their psyche as a normal part of their day, it will be easier to stay motivated for the long-term and to reach the proverbial gold pot at the end of the rainbow of a prosperous business.