

# A Shout out to Younger Lawyers: Business Development is the Key to your Destiny

By **Larry Bodine**, a business development advisor based in Tucson and Chicago. For the last 19 years, he has helped law firms nationwide attract new clients and generate new business by using strategy, business development training and individual attorney coaching. See [www.LarryBodine.com](http://www.LarryBodine.com). He can be reached at 630.942.0977 and [Lbodine@LawMarketing.com](mailto:Lbodine@LawMarketing.com).



Larry Bodine

*“The people who stand closest to the cash register have the most secure jobs.”*

When I was a young associate, the partners took us to a private club and got us all liquored up. Then they lined us up against a wall and said they had an announcement: we were now expected to start finding our own clients. The partners were no longer going to put files on our plates.

None of us knew what to do. We were all scared witless.

Along with many of my classmates, I had gone through law school so that I would *never have to* sell. Now this unwritten covenant had been broken. I felt as if I had been defrauded. But I quickly learned that selling legal services was completely different from selling used cars – and that I was already doing some practice development behaviors.

## Your frame of mind can hurt you

Many young lawyers resent the imposition of having to generate new clients, because they won't be the relationship lawyer or don't get any origination credit for it. Those benefits go to a partner. As a result practice development can appear to be how seniors become richer off young lawyers.

Further, who has time to market? If you work at a firm that requires 1,800 billable hours per year, you're in a "lifestyle" law firm! Associates come in early and stay late at the office. Pulling an all-nighter is considered a rite of passage.

This frame of mind will hurt you in your law career and in any other profession you enter. It shows that you have an "employee" mentality about work. You expect to show up, do the job and get paid for it. You expect to get assignments from older partners. Eventually you

### [Survey: Business Development Now an Essential Skill for Law Firm Associates](#)

This groundbreaking survey of the legal profession demonstrates that law firms are *very* interested in the capability of their associates to contribute to business development. But ironically, 57% of law firms fail to provide them any training to generate new business. Click above or visit <http://bit.ly/djZwJp> to read more from the survey.

will become habituated to taking orders and you'll wind up being a 40-year old lawyer with no clients of your own. You'll be a very good lawyer, but you'll still be told what to do by the lawyers with the clout. Don't let this happen to you.

### **Eggs Benedict and Croque-monsieurs**

When I began law practice, I had just moved into the city, and didn't know many people. So I would call the people I worked with at the client – young people like me – and meet them for lunch. I picked up the tab because the firm gave me a \$500 expense account for client entertainment. It was great – we had eggs Benedict and Croque-monsieur sandwiches for lunch, and became social friends. I didn't realize it then, but I was also forming a bond that would last a long time.

I had also picked a niche – I wanted to be an in-court lawyer, a litigator who stood before a judge and advocated on his feet. So I pounced on the dusty files that had come up on the dismissal calendar, appeared at the hearing and turned them into checks. On the other hand, I dragged my feet on assignments to write ordinances for local communities on maintaining dangerous pets. The partners noticed and gave me more motions to argue. I loved it.

I also recruited a mentor – a partner who had the Midas touch for getting new business. His office was paneled with knotty-pine wood and decorated with game trophies on the wall. It was clear he was a hunter in more ways than one. When he gave me an assignment, I'd inquire how the case came to him personally. I'd ask him how he got new files and he regaled me with crazy stories. He would go to the Saturday college football games wearing a blazer in his school's crimson color – and wing-tip shoes. He would sit next to someone similarly attired, who would also turn out to be a businessman, and he would come back from the game with a new file!

But mainly, he said, he got business by staying in touch with people, visiting them at their offices, and putting his personal touch on every contact he had with clients. Business development wasn't a special activity for him, it was part of what he did every day.

### **Get into the Arena**

Whenever I had written a motion for a partner, I always asked if I could be in court when it was argued. I was told "no," because the client wouldn't pay for it. That didn't discourage me because I'd find another way to get into court. In a previous job, I had become fascinated by watching great litigators argue closing arguments in first-degree murder trials. I had been a newspaper reporter assigned to cover the courts, and watching master advocates got me interested in law in the first place. I wanted to get out of the audience and into the arena.

I encourage you to adopt the same attitude. Don't let your career happen to you – take charge of your own destiny. Find the kind of work that turns you on, and pursue it with gusto. Get to know the people at the client so that you can take a personal interest in the matter. Seize the

opportunity to take people to lunch, a game or a trade association meeting. Become the captain of your own destiny.

---

For more on this topic, call:

Larry Bodine, Esq.

Business Development Advisor

Tel: 630.942.0977

E-mail: [Lbodine@LawMarketing.com](mailto:Lbodine@LawMarketing.com)

Web: <http://www.LarryBodine.com>

Assisting law firms for 20 years:

- Training lawyers at firm retreats.
- Coaching lawyers to develop their personal marketing plans.
- Developing business development strategies.
- Using technology to market a practice.

