

How Much Time Should I Spend on Business Development?

By Larry Bodine, a business development advisor with a nationwide practice. He has helped 250+ law firms generate new revenue by devising strategies, conducting business development retreats and individually coaching attorneys. He can be reached at www.LarryBodine.com and 630.942.0977.



This question comes up a lot from lawyers who arrive at the office at 7 AM, eat lunch at their desk, work until 7 PM and go straight home. They don't leave their offices unless it's a court appearance or a meeting with a client. When they do go out during the workday, it's to have lunch or beers with their colleagues at the office.

And they wonder why they don't generate any new files.

I do recommend that a certain number of hours be devoted to business development, but what must happen first is a change of attitude. You need to get up out of your chair and meet people face to face to originate new business. Successful business development happens out of the office, at a client's offices and in person. The time lawyers spend billing hours will determine their income. The time they spend on business development will determine their future.

Some lawyers are inclined to spend nothing on business development. However, the rainmakers I talk to – these are the 10 percent of lawyers at every firm that bring in most of the business – spend 500 hours a year, or about 10 hours a week on business development. They are marketing all the time. When they walk into a room, they look at it as a business development opportunity.

You cannot pursue business development in your spare time. The way to find time for it when you are crazy busy is to *mix it into your current activities*. For instance, if it is your custom in the morning to stop by Starbucks and get a coffee, I recommend that you call up a referral source a day ahead of time and say, "I'm going to stop at Starbucks tomorrow and get a coffee. Why don't we meet there and I will buy you that double tall skinny vanilla latte that I know you like?" Spend some time with your referral source.

You have to eat lunch. You must stop working through lunch and take the time to go visit a client. Get face to face with them. They will not think it is a bother. In fact, they will be impressed and flattered that you came out to see them.

Devote one or two evenings a month to going to a trade association meeting. Spend time at a meeting where you are one of the few lawyers in the room and make a point to get to know people.

Get up from 7 AM to 9 AM on Saturday and Sunday and spend a few hours planning when and how you will spend time on business development. *If you weave business development into your regular day, you will find that it is not really a burden.*

A good benchmark I recommend is 200 hours a year for business development activities. This works out to an average of four hours a week and is a very achievable

goal. If you do the business development activities, you will get the business development results.

Four hours a week is an average. If you are in a trial working 12 hours a day, you may only have time to send a business development email or make a business development phone call. The point is to do *something* every single day.

I find a lot of lawyers only pursue business development when things are slow. That is probably the worst time to pursue business development, because what you are trying to do is dig yourself out of a hole. These lawyers think, "I have nothing to do, so now I'm going to start beating the bushes for some business." What will happen is you will enter the marketplace cold. That is not how you attract new business. The time to do business development is when you are extremely busy because this is when you are red hot and in demand. Business development is not something you do in your spare time. This is something that you should make part of your daily routine.

I recommend that you should spend time on one-on-one networking. One of the best rainmakers I know is a name partner a Chicago law firm. He told me that he had a sure-fire method that worked. He owned a big house in a fancy neighborhood, and he had an enormous dining room with a big dining room table. He liked to invite people over to dinner. This way he could be the connoisseur of wines and have a private chef brought in. He would always invite clients, friends, and potential clients to these dinners. *He originated millions of dollars of business from his own dining room table.*

The point of the story is to pursue the activities that you are already good at because, chances are, you will find the time to do them. If you like to speak, that is terrific. If you do better with one-on-one situations, then get on a committee at a trade association and meet people one-on-one. If you like to write, I recommend you write for websites or write a blog.

But do at least one business development activity every single day.

For more on this topic, call:

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