

Play to Win

Control Your Own Destiny through Business Development

By [Sally J. Schmidt](#) | Aug. 24.15 | [Daily Dispatch](#), [Legal Marketing](#), [Marketing & Business Development](#), [Play to Win](#)



In a coaching meeting, a young partner was unenthusiastic as we discussed potential marketing and business development activities. It was clear he was troubled, so I asked what he was thinking. His response: “Am I better off being a really good service partner and working a lot of hours than spending my time trying to develop relationships that may never pay off?”

I understand the sentiment. Lawyers have many competing demands — job, family, friendships, personal interests — and sometimes feel as though none of them are getting the proper attention. Lawyers often lack control over their time. It can be hard to carve out 200 hours to market when you bill 2,200; it can be frustrating to serve on a board but miss meeting after meeting because of work obligations. On top of that, one can invest a lot of time building relationships and implementing activities with no short-term payoff and few guarantees of long-term success.

I really do get it. But, back to the young partner, I answered his question the only way I could: “No, you will not be better off.”

Payoffs of Marketing and Business Development Efforts

Despite the fact that the outcomes of marketing and business development efforts may be amorphous, these two functions provide a number of rewards to lawyers. Here are a few.

1. Self-sufficiency. One of the greatest benefits — if not *the* greatest benefit — of developing your own book of business is the opportunity to control your destiny. I could recount dozens of tales where a lawyer lost his or her status, work flow or even job because of a dependency on what became an unreliable source of business. One story in particular stands out for me. A large firm picked up a number of lawyers through a merger. While they had been partners at their former firm, two of the lawyers had no business of their own; they had worked their entire careers on matters for one large regulated client. They were given a year to develop enough business to sustain themselves. Unfortunately, they had done little to nothing up to that point —

writing, entertainment, speaking, networking, organizational activity — on which to build a practice. Sadly, both ultimately were let go.

Marketing success means you will have the opportunity to decide on what kinds of matters or with what kinds of clients you will work. It means you will not be beholden to other lawyers for work. It means you will be happier and more satisfied with your practice because you are doing things and working with people you enjoy. If that's not a benefit, I don't know what is.

2. Better client service. Based on my interviews of clients, I have come to believe that good marketers often provide greater value to their clients. Because they are monitoring relevant developments for their articles, blogs or presentations, they are more apt to bring things to clients' attention. Because they are active in industry and business organizations, they are more likely to understand what makes their clients tick. Because they are networking, they can identify resources, products and professionals that may be helpful to their clients.

3. Financial benefits. For those seeking the brass ring of partnership, a book of business is essential in most firms. And candidly, if money is your motivation, rainmakers generally get the greatest financial rewards. Think about it: How many lawyers — perhaps within your own firm — can draft a contract? Now, how many can bring in a client substantial enough to keep several people busy? Whether you like it or not, good rainmakers are scarcer than good lawyers.

4. Credentials. The benefits of your marketing activities accrue to you. Your brand or the perceptions you create are yours to keep; they are on your bio and become part of your story. They are even portable, if necessary.

I know some lawyers simply want to be employees. They are looking for jobs with less pressure or more predictable hours. They have no interest in partnership.

However, if you are, or want to be, a partner in a law firm, you need to build a practice, both for the good of the firm and your own good. Yes, it can be hard to find the time, but you must. Today, real security is a book of business. Consider marketing and business development an investment in yourself.

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