

Teaching New Lawyers to Market

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There is no question that the top priority of any new lawyer is to learn to be a good lawyer, to focus on quality and substantive development. Still, those firms that want to turn their associates into partners should recognize that failing to educate associates about marketing does a great disservice to associates and the firm.

New business does not come quickly. It results from years of sustained effort and relationship building. The seeds that are planted in the first five, seven or ten years of a lawyer's practice will determine in large part future business development success. The firm, its partners and its associates must take equal responsibility for cultivating those seeds.

Teaching Marketing: Five Tactics for Firms and Partners

Many associates want to participate in marketing, but they just don't know what to do or how to do it. While the firm and its partners can show new lawyers the way through a number of techniques, there are five particularly important ones.

1. Explain the importance of marketing. Associates should know how marketing will affect their future with the



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firm. Tell them whether client development efforts or results are considerations in bonuses, criteria for partnership, factors in partner compensation and other relevant issues.

2. Clarify expectations. Once associates know the importance of marketing and business development, they'll want to know what the firm expects them to do. Explain the kinds of behaviors or level of commitment the firm encourages in new lawyers, from activities with existing clients to networking in the community. How many hours should it take? How should the time be recorded? What approvals do they need? Let associates know specifics.

3. Encourage involvement in marketing initiatives. First-hand activities are the best way to learn business development skills. So have partners take associates to client meetings, involve them in seminar preparation and ask them to help write proposals for new business.

In the old days, associates were told not to worry about developing business, just to concentrate on making partners' lives easier. But times have changed. We need to nurture new lawyers' business development skills.

Have them shadow a partner at a cocktail party.

4. Provide training programs. In addition to marketing mentors, the firm can provide more formalized training. Even those who are not natural “salespeople” can develop important skills. Hold sessions on how to get involved in outside organizations, how to network at a social event, how to make effective presentations and what goes into a winning proposal.

5. Don't give mixed messages. Many firms will say that marketing is important. But then partners complain when associates take an hour out of the office for networking activities. For associates to feel that marketing is indeed important, all partners need to recognize and reward development activities—and to do so consistently.

Building Relationships: Five Tactics for Associates

Associates, of course, need to be proactive in implementing individual marketing efforts. Specific activities will vary greatly depending on the associate's personality, practice area, age, community, opportunities and other factors. There are, though, five important tactics for any associate.

1. Provide excellent service to all partners. An associate usually has two

clients: the firm's client and the partner who assigns work. Some partners give associates many opportunities for direct client contact; other partners do not. So, at a minimum, associates should practice their client service skills on partners—skills like clarifying expectations, being incredibly responsive, paying attention to detail, providing timely status reports. This makes partners more comfortable giving the kinds of work assignments on which an associate can build.

2. Provide excellent service to clients. With the approval of the partners, associates should build relationships with firm clients, particularly with counterparts at client organizations. Today's loan officer or claims supervisor may be tomorrow's general counsel or president. Existing clients are the best potential sources of future business—if they're happy with the firm's work.

3. Network. It's never too early to start a network. As an associate, you should build a network of people you can potentially help and who might be able to help you or your clients someday. The network will depend on an individual's practice area and interests, but it can include other lawyers, accountants, trust officers, fellow alumni, former colleagues and any number of other contacts. Effective networking takes diligence and organization.

4. Find and exploit a niche. The most effective marketers find something on which to hang their hats. It could be a subspecialty within a practice area (like agriculture-related IP work), a specific industry or clientele (say family-owned businesses) or a particular case or matter that provides marketing opportunities.

5. Enhance the resumé. New lawyers need to look for opportunities to build their credibility and their resumé through professional and marketing

activities. Options range from being active in industry associations that serve your target clientele to writing articles and making presentations to related audiences.

Making the Message Loud and Clear

Many associates today enter the legal profession more sophisticated and business-oriented than their counterparts of old. Some have worked in other fields or have business backgrounds. They understand that the law is a profession *and* a business, and that cultivating clients is important. Firms need the same understanding.

Most associates don't have a problem with marketing as long as they're given clear and consistent messages about what the firm expects of them. Partners must remember that their actions speak louder than their words and show that they know associates' marketing efforts are important. The firm will thereby plant the seeds for new lawyers to be more successful in private practice, control their own destinies and generally be happier working in the law. ■

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Further reading:

- “Marketing to the Middleman” by Sally J. Schmidt. *Law Practice Management*. March 2001.
- “Developing New Business by Developing Relationships” by Sally J. Schmidt. *The Practical Lawyer*. June 1999.
- *Marketing the Law Firm: Business Development Techniques* by Sally J. Schmidt. Law Journal Press. Updated semiannually.
- *The Complete Guide to Marketing Your Law Practice* by Hollis Hatfield Weishar and James A. Durham. ABA Law Practice Management Section, 1999.

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