

PRACTICE DEVELOPMENT NEWS

A Publication of the Minnesota State Bar Association Practice Development Section

MSBA



APRIL 1995

CREATING PARTNERSHIPS WITH CLIENTS

"HOW OUTSIDE COUNSEL CAN MORE EFFECTIVELY MEET CLIENT NEEDS"

TUESDAY, APRIL 25, 1995

11:30 AM: REGISTRATION

11:30 AM: LUNCH

NOON: PROGRAM AND
DISCUSSION

MSBA Conference Center Auditorium, Lower Level, 514 Nicollet Mall in Minneapolis

\$15 for Section members
\$20 for non-Section members

Call Janny Grice at the MSBA,
73-6305, for a registration form.

By Sally J. Schmidt

Good client relationships don't just happen; like all relationships, they take hard work and dedication. This is particularly true in today's competitive legal environment. As clients have recognized the abundance of legal talent at their disposal, they have started demanding more than just good legal work. They want attorneys who are flexible and willing to work with them to develop the most effective and efficient methods of handling legal issues that arise.

For lawyers of business clients, I suggest considering the following ways to solidify client relationships:

(1) Get to know the client. Many clients feel that their lawyers do not know enough about their businesses, industries or goals and objectives to be truly effective. Clients want counselors—lawyers who can be business advisors as well as legal advisors. How do you do this? Read trade papers and magazines. Attend industry meetings. Attend client planning or annual meetings, possibly at no charge. Hold relationship meetings with clients to discuss future needs. Read client brochures, annual reports and product flyers.

(2) Act like a partner.

Clients want to play a larger role in the legal services and the decision-making. They believe this will allow greater control over costs and outcomes. What should the law firm do to encourage this? Let the client play an active role when discussing or making decisions about the matter. Let client representatives handle logical aspects of the matter, whether typing documents or doing discovery. Customize your status reporting. And, perhaps most important, put together a team of people dedicated to the client, and ensure continuity of the personnel.

(3) Consider win-win pricing alternatives.

In exchange for a volume of work and loyalty, you might offer some alternative pricing arrangements for clients. These will thank the client for the business and perhaps let the law firm assume some risk. These alternatives may vary from arrangements where you charge no disbursements, to situations where you provide a budget "not to exceed," to different pricing levels depending on different outcomes.

(4) Use technology to bind your clients.

Technology may provide an excellent link to clients. Investigate how e-mail, private bulletin boards or

other technology can make your communications and document exchanges more effective or efficient. Some clients may want direct access into their documents or billing records.

(5) Finally, add value to your relationships.

What can you do to give clients something extra? Provide clients with in-house workshops. Alert them to changes in the law. Make the client look good, through reporting, results or other opportunities (e.g., articles or seminar panels). Introduce the client to other people who may be helpful, like politicians or industry experts.

There are many, many things lawyers can and should do beyond providing quality legal work to build client relationships and, more important, value. Good relationships require making an investment in your clients.

Sally J. Schmidt is President of Schmidt Marketing, Inc. in Burnsville, Minnesota, which provides market research, training and consulting services. She was formerly the Director of Client Relations and Marketing for a 100-attorney firm in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She was a founder and the first President of the National Law Firm Marketing Association, and wrote a book on law firm marketing entitled, *Marketing the Law Firm: Business Development Techniques*, published by the Law Journal Seminars-Press (1991). In 1994, Ms. Schmidt was inducted as a Fellow into the College of Law Practice Management.

OFFICER ELECTIONS SCHEDULED FOR JUNE: NOMINATIONS ACCEPTED NOW

During the 1995 MSBA Convention on June 22-23 in Bloomington, a new Section Governing Council will be elected to govern the programs and activities of the MSBA Practice Development Section from July 1, 1995, to June 30, 1996.

The Practice Development Section has been a bar committee since 1985. The goal of the Section is to continue to increase the number of valuable services and programs provided to both attorney and non-attorney members. Among the many services the Section currently provides are: 1) easy access to in-house marketing professionals and consultants who can answer your specific questions regarding practice development; 2) access to marketing resource materials and articles; 3) networking opportunities; and 4) luncheon programs that regularly deal with the latest marketing and client relations topics.

These programs and services are made possible with the assistance of the Section's Governing Council. The Council positions and the duties of each position are listed below:

Chairperson: Presides at all meetings of the Section, prepares and presents an annual report to the MSBA and, as needed, designates various Committee Chairpersons within the Section.

Vice Chairperson: Presides at all meetings of the Section in the absence of the Chairperson and performs other duties and acts as customarily pertain to the office.

Secretary: Keeps minutes of all meetings and other records of the Section and its membership, as well as maintains correspondence and gives notice of meetings as requested by the Chairperson.

Treasurer: Has charge of the funds of the Section subject to the general supervision and control of the Section Council. The Treasurer also renders financial reports on an as-needed basis during Section meetings.

Additional Members: Up to five additional Section members may also be elected to the Council. These individuals head various Section subcommittees as needed, or carry out other duties as requested by the Chairperson.

To nominate yourself or someone else, please call Tim Turner (612/335-1519) or Elise Schadauer (612/343-5602), the 1995 chairpersons of the MSBA Practice Development Section's Nomination Committee. All individuals nominated or interested in serving will be included on the ballot which will be mailed to all Section members prior to the June Annual Meeting.