

play to win

Following Up Naturally: Tips for Nurturing Business Relationships

By [Sally J. Schmidt](#)

In my experience, even the most unsocial or introverted lawyers have a decent stable of contacts. Myriad people will cross your path simply in the course of your work, from accountants and bankers to experts and co-counsel, not to mention clients. If you build enough quality relationships, you have a good chance of developing business. The problem is that many lawyers don't nurture their business relationships.

Depending on the research you see, it takes [six to eight “touches” before you will get business from a prospect](#). Yet lawyers find it difficult to find ways to stay in touch that are comfortable, are authentic and add value — a challenge the pandemic has exacerbated. But there is one thing anyone can do: Take advantage of natural opportunities.

Seven Ideas for Strengthening Business Relationships, Naturally

Here are some things that occur over the normal course of time that you can use to stay in touch — or top of mind — with clients or prospects.

A New Year

When you turn the page on a year, it is an excellent time to ask a client to have a formal discussion with you. You can reflect on the past year — the work that was done, activities that were undertaken, even the fees that were paid — and then look forward to the upcoming year. What plans does the client have? How can you best position the firm to help?

Social Media

If you follow your contacts on social media, you can like, forward or comment on their posts, and they will see your acknowledgments.

Firm Materials

When your firm sends out webinar invitations or substantive alerts, forward them [with a personal note](#) to people who would be interested. Everyone receives an avalanche of messages; it is helpful to bring a salient item to someone's attention.

Client Events

If you're paying attention, there will be many happenings and milestones you can recognize for your targets. You can send congratulations or acknowledgments for events ranging from closings of major deals and successful fundraisers to company anniversaries and new product launches.

The Holidays

Are [holiday cards](#) effective? It depends. Does your card include a personal note? If so, the answer is yes. Don't waste the opportunity to communicate with someone on a holiday. It doesn't have to be in December. Some lawyers take advantage of holidays like Thanksgiving, New Year's Day or even July Fourth.

Conferences or Meetings

When the world resumes in-person contact, be sure to use your time in meetings to further your business relationships. Seek out your contacts at cocktail parties, and sit by someone you want to target at meetings or meals. Don't leave it to chance.

Outside Activities

One of the benefits of being involved in things outside the firm is that you will have opportunities to help other people. When you are writing an article, you can ask contacts to give you insights or quotes or even to co-author with you. Similarly, you can involve your contacts as speakers or panelists on programs with which you're involved. Organizations in which you are active continually seek good members or leaders; you can offer up your targets for appointments and other opportunities. You can even work on a pro bono or charitable project with your contacts.

Follow-Up Is Critical for Developing Successful Business Relationships

Follow-up doesn't need to feel awkward, and you don't need to be pushy. But you do need to be intentional about capitalizing on natural opportunities to further your business relationships.