Play to Win

Branching Out to Expand Your Clientele

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As a sports fan, I always like reading about "coaching trees." Coaching trees are like family trees but they show how one coach produced other successful coaches who went on to other teams. While there is some disagreement about who has generated the greatest tree, many will point to Bill Walsh, one of whose early "branches" was Mike Mike Holmgren, whose own branches produced Andy Reid and Jon Gruden.

When we talk about expanding relationships, lawyers often think about a particular client contact: "How can I get more of the same work from this person or how can I get this person to use other services or offices of the firm?" However, like coaching trees, client contacts can frequently lead to other new opportunities if you're paying attention.

How to Branch Out to Find New Prospects

There are a lot of tenets we use in lawyer business development. Two of the most basic and important are:

- **Start with existing relationships.** It's easiest to grow a business from the relationships you already have rather than building new ones.
- **Leverage your activities.** Once you have invested your time in developing something (an article, presentation or checklist, for example), you should look for opportunities to reuse it.

A lot of lawyers find it difficult to break in with new prospects. However, you're often closer than you think if you follow the links presented through existing relationships.

Here are some examples:

- **Franchisee meetings.** Franchisees of a given restaurant chain, for example, frequently have meetings where they talk about common issues. If you have represented one franchisee, can you ask for an opportunity to present to all of them on an issue with which you've helped your client?
- **Brokers' clients.** If you work in the employee benefits area, you can ask brokers for a chance to get in front of their clients. This could be a webinar on a hot topic or a regular contribution, such as a column in their client newsletter.
- **Clients' contacts.** Say you represent an insurance company and work with a couple of adjusters in one office. You can ask them to help you with an entrée to others in their office or region by circulating something you put together, like a process chart or form.
- **Client company-wide meetings.** A financial institution you help with creditors' rights issues may have a company-wide retreat or meeting where you can provide helpful information to representatives of other branch locations.
- **Client associations or networks.** Your clients frequently belong to industry or professional associations. If you represented a law firm on a coverage matter, for example, you can find out if the firm belongs to a network of similar firms or whether your primary contact is active in a related bar section or committee. Then you can ask for the chance to provide substantive information to others facing similar situations.

Coaching Trees

If you're ever stuck on how to expand your practice, take a closer look at the opportunities your existing relationships present. Success often can be measured by how many branches you create off an original contact's tree.