

Play to Win

Business Development Skills That Don't Take Talent

By [Sally J. Schmidt](#) | Apr.30.18 | [Business Development](#), [Daily Dispatch](#), [Play to Win](#)



Those who know me know I love sports. So, it should come as no surprise that I follow sports-related teams, figures and organizations on social media. About twice a year, I run across a list targeted at young would-be athletes of things that require “zero talent” — things like attitude, work ethic and being coachable.

When the list popped up again recently, many of the factors struck me as appropriate for lawyers who would like to be rainmakers but claim they are not “naturals.” So, with apologies to the original authors, here are my thoughts on five behaviors in which any lawyer can engage that will improve business development efforts and results.

Five Things That Don't Require Business Development Talent

- 1. Enthusiasm.** Clients want to work with lawyers who exhibit passion and energy — lawyers who like what they do (or at least look like it). Whether you are networking at a cocktail party or talking with a client about the next potential deal, show enthusiasm for your practice, your profession and your craft.
- 2. Effort.** At some point, you may need to push yourself to do things you might not be comfortable doing. If you don't like public speaking, sign up for a Toastmasters chapter. If you've been wanting to write, start a blog and make a commitment to post every week. If you tend to eat lunch at your desk, make a resolution to have lunch with a colleague or prospect at least twice a month outside the office. Improving your odds is up to you.
- 3. Listening skills.** Stop talking so much. Ask questions and listen to the responses. Ask follow-up questions to learn what makes people tick. Remember the adage: It's better to be *interested* than *interesting*. Clients and referral sources can tell if you are making a sincere effort to build a relationship. Being a good listener will give you a leg up on your competition.
- 4. Preparation.** Whatever you do, do it well. If you're going to a networking event, look at the list of attendees, practice your elevator speech and prepare some good conversation topics. If you are giving a presentation, ask someone to sit in on a run-through to suggest improvements in content, slides or timing. Preparation shows.
- 5. Organization.** Finally, organize your marketing and business development efforts. Business development success often comes from sustaining efforts and following up. Make a list of your top targeted referral sources; calendar appointments to contact people quarterly; use your assistant to set up regular client visits; develop a spreadsheet to track your “touches”; write an annual personal plan and

review it monthly; keep track of personal details about your contacts. Any or all of these could be great additions to your business development protocols.

When it comes to developing business, you don't have to be a natural to experience success. You do, however, have to make an effort.

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