

Play to Win

[**Invest in Yourself**](http://www.attorneyatwork.com/invest-in-yourself/)

By [Sally J. Schmidt](http://www.attorneyatwork.com/author/sally-j-schmidt/) | May.27.14 | [Business Development](http://www.attorneyatwork.com/category/business-development/), [Daily Dispatch](http://www.attorneyatwork.com/category/articles/), [Legal Careers](http://www.attorneyatwork.com/category/legal-careers-2/), [Play to Win](http://www.attorneyatwork.com/category/play-to-win/)



Two coaching situations recently occurred in close proximity to each other and the contrast was striking.

In the first, Attorney A, a partner, was interested in building a niche practice in an industry in which his largest client operates. We identified an industry association of which he had not been aware, and that group, coincidentally, had a meeting coming up in his city. He sent an email to his practice group head requesting the funds to attend ($500). On our next coaching call, I asked how the meeting had gone. He said, “I didn’t go.” When I asked why not, he said, “Because the firm wouldn’t pay the registration fee.”

In the second situation, Attorney B, a non-equity partner, wanted to become certified in a specialty area. He identified a training program out of state that ran over several days and cost a few thousand dollars (plus travel expenses). He made a business case to his law firm, which determined there was not enough business development potential in the activity to justify the support. What did Attorney B do? He paid for it himself.

The dirty little secret of marketing and business development is this: It’s not just good for your firm; it’s good for you.

Those credentials you build? They’re portable. Those contacts you make? They’re personal. That experience you have? It’s yours to keep. The benefit of the time (and money) you invest in marketing and business development (presuming it is spent in the right places) accrues to *you*.

**Focus on Three Things**

Your firm can provide you with training, coaching and resources, but the only one who can build your practice is you. Here are the three areas on which you should focus.

**1. Building your network and client base.**

* Get involved in outside activities where you can meet professional contemporaries, preferably those who have a connection to your practice.
* Attend firm events when they’re offered — help fill tables at sponsored functions, go to client dinners, attend games.
* Actively seek out potential referral sources and plan to meet them on a regular basis.
* Visit clients and call them from time to time.

**2. Building your reputation and value**.

* Write, blog and speak to establish yourself as a thought leader and subject matter expert (within the firm as well as outside).
* Find an outside organization you can get passionate about and volunteer to contribute and be a leader.
* Stay in touch with people you know by sending helpful information and resources.
* Obtain credentials — certification, additional degrees, a weekend MBA.

**3. Building your skills and expertise.**

* Ask for work in practice areas that you would like to build.
* Take on a pro bono case to get trial experience.
* Do something to improve a weakness (e.g., volunteer to be on a finance committee to learn more about financial reporting, join Toastmasters to improve your speaking skills).
* Take a CLE course to expand your substantive expertise.

**Take Ownership**

One of my marketing director friends recently told me of a bankruptcy partner in her firm — suddenly not busy and anxious about it — who came to her and said, “Market me.” No one can “market you” if you don’t market yourself.

Take ownership of your practice! If you have to do something on your own time, you will be the beneficiary. If you have to dig into your own pocket, the payoff ultimately will be yours. And the best part? You will be more secure in your future and more satisfied with your practice.

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