

Be a Counselor, Not an Advocate, When You're Selling Your Services

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What comes to mind when you think about salespeople? Is it a guy with a pink tie at a used car dealership trying to sell you a pink VW? It's a drag to deal with these people, because they're relentlessly selling you. And you know first-hand how off-putting that is.



Larry Bodine

We all went to law school so we could avoid having to be this guy. This is not how legal services are sold. If you follow my approach, this will never happen.

- If you follow my approach, you'll never be rejected. No one is ever going to hang up on the phone when you're talking to them.
- You're never going to have a door slammed in your face.
- You'll also never have to make cold calls where you're calling a complete stranger. Lawyers often think that when they're in front of a client or prospective client that they're supposed to be promoting—themselves and their firm. That causes you to talk a lot, and to talk a lot about yourself, and to talk a lot about your firm. You've really got to learn is to stop doing that.

Business development is not advocacy

You've must stop thinking about business development as you making a case or convincing people to buy your services. People really don't want to listen to someone talking about themselves. Instead, you should realize that you should interview people to see if they have any problems you can solve. It's a completely different behavior, and it leaves a completely different impression and prompts a much better response from the people that you're engaged with.

If you asked the CEO of a company or the owner of a business, "Do you have any legal problems?" they'd probably say "No, we're in pretty good shape." But if you asked them, "Between you and your customers, do you ever have any credit issues," or "Do you ever find that you're having disputes with your vendors?" Notice that you've inquired about

business problems and we haven't mentioned any legal terms of art at all. They'll say, "Yeah, I'm having a lot of problems with customers that won't pay and customers going bankrupt. And this one vendor doesn't ship the supplies according to the contract we have." They've just articulated for you are several problems that you can solve with legal services. The key is that asked questions and got them to talk to them about business. This is how you develop new business.

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The secret rainmakers know

The secret to business development is that it's not about you or your qualifications, or the firm's reputation, or your credentials. Whenever you are in a business development situation, get the focus off of your firm, off of your practice group, and off of yourself, and particularly off of what you have to sell. The reason for this is that the client is not interested in any of these topics. What they want to talk about is their favorite topic, which is themselves, and particularly the problems that they have.

A good motto to keep in mind is that if the other person is talking, you are selling. In your questions, you are probing for change. Change is good for lawyers, because that creates legal work. So what I recommend is whenever you go to a new business meeting, don't bring along the firm brochure and your biography. After you leave, that's all going into the wastebasket. Instead, show up with five good, intelligent questions, such as:

- How does the company plan to grow this year?
- What are the business obstacles that are preventing you from earning more revenue?
- How are your competitors affecting your bottom line?
- What trends in your industry are affecting your company most?
- Are you having a business dispute or credit issues with other businesses?

These questions are all designed to get at change. And the answer is probably going to be an answer that's going to involve some sort of project that involves legal services.

Dr. Lawyer, expert salesperson

The key to it is to act like a doctor. Think of when you're sitting there on the little bed in the doctor's office, and you're wearing a gown that opens up in the back. The doctor walks in, looks over your file, and then the doctor asks you a question. And it's usually some form of, "Where does it hurt?" or "What's bothering you?" You have just walked into one of the most powerful sales processes that there is, because what the doctor will ask you a set of diagnostic questions. And this is what lawyer should do.

The doctor asks, "Does it hurt here? Does it hurt there?" The doctor is trying to zero in on points of pain. The doctor makes a diagnosis and closes you for the next steps. Now you may not think you're being sold, because here you are in the presence of this attentive professional, who's asking questions about you. The doctor will say, "You need to buy this very expensive prescription. It's \$50 a pill, but it'll make you better." And you know what? You'll go out and get that pill, because you want to feel better. And then the doctor might say, "You need to have this \$75,000 operation, because you're really facing a serious problem here." If the choice is having the operation or dying, you're going to do it.

What you're looking for is some sort of trauma, something that hurts really badly, and something they want to take care of right away. People buy services to avoid or relieve pain. Trauma can be something negative, like "the CEO just got indicted," or "One of our factories just rolled out a tainted product." The flip side of trauma is that something really good happened to the client. That might be, "for the first time since the recession began, we're actually going to build a new factory, and we're going to be hiring a lot of people," or "we've got a great new product and think it will sell really well." This is your cue to say, "Tell me more about that." Before you know it, you've got a conversation going about a legal service they need. The key thing to remember is that if there is no trauma, there is no sale. People buy services to relieve pain, and frankly, everybody's got some issue that they would like to deal with. And what everyone really wants is an intelligent person that they can tell their problems to. And if you're the person with the attentive ear, and as we mentioned before, you ask the right questions, you listen actively, this is going to all turn into new business for you.

For more on this topic, call:
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