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## How Clients Choose Lawyers

By [Larry Bodine](#) | Apr.20.11 |



*Sitting there, staring at the inside of your office door and wondering how long you'll have to wait before a new client strolls in? Stop it. To attract new clients, you need to set yourself apart from other lawyers—and that takes a lot more work than updating your LinkedIn profile. How to do it? Legal marketing wizard Larry Bodine says there are three big truths you need to understand about how clients really choose lawyers. Believe them and make them your own—and open the door!*

### 1. Clients Want Experts, Not Generalists

You don't want to be known as a generalist because, frankly, clients don't want generalists. I illustrate this with a story about the time I was riding my bicycle out in the deserts of Arizona. I hit a rock, went over the handle bars and broke my collarbone. Even though I was in screaming pain, I knew at that very moment that when I got to the hospital *I did not want a generalist* who was good at setting bones. No, I wanted a sports medicine doctor to put me back together so that I could get back on my bicycle again. And *that* is how clients shop for lawyers.

The idea here is to become an industry expert. Start by looking over your list of clients and sorting them into lines of business—not by practice group, by *lines of business*. There's no need to be precise about this. It can be as broad as "food and beverage" or "transportation industry" or "manufacturing industry." Now, whatever industry most of your clients are in, that's the industry you need to become an expert in.

- Join that trade association.
- Be seen and visible at that trade association.
- Go to that association's meetings and events so people know they can expect to find you there.
- Demonstrate your expertise—get on the board of directors, become the newsletter editor or become the program director of the business organization.

### 2. Clients Give Work to People They Know and Like

Rainmakers become rainmakers because they have more business relationships than other attorneys—and they know how to maintain them. You want to learn from and behave like a rainmaker. Rainmakers visit clients. They schedule quarterly meetings where the topic of

discussion is “how’s business?” Rainmakers want to find out what obstacles the business is encountering, or what plans it has to grow. At these meetings, they’re not talking about current matters they are working on, they are looking ahead for the *next* matter.

The thing to remember is that clients are just like everyone else. They’re not going to give any work to that West Virginia lawyer who had never met any of his clients. They’re not going to give work to someone whose only contact with them is a FedEx shipment. And they’re not going to give work to someone with whom they have an e-mail relationship. They are going to give it to people they *know*. So, you need to get better at building good business relationships.

### **3. Clients Give Work to Trusted Personal Counselors**

It’s lonely at the top. CEOs can’t go to the board of directors and complain how hard their job is. They can’t go to their direct reports and talk about how difficult their job is, either. They need somebody to talk to. Who better than a lawyer to offer a shoulder to cry on? You want clients to turn to you as a lawyer as someone who listens, someone who can offer business advice, and someone who they can talk with about their problems. And of course, in the process of them talking about their problems, you will be offering legal solutions.

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