

Two Important Things You Need To Know

Drop your ego

I'm embarrassed to say this, but it's true: Attorneys are the worst networkers. I don't know what happened in law school that has caused so many lawyers to think they know everything, but they don't. Attorneys, as a profession, seem to be the worst at being willing to admit that success doesn't happen alone. Sure they can sit on Westlaw for four hours researching an obscure legal decision but when it comes time to meeting other people for the purposes of building their practice, they need help! If no one knows who you are, I don't care how great a case law sleuth you are; you're going to be homeless!

I suspect where it really comes from is the need to always be right. Most attorneys have that type of personality whereby they are right, the other side is wrong and it's as clear as night and day. But that myth should have been debunked the first day of your first class in law school. There are always two sides to every lawsuit and each party thinks they're right.

Networking is entirely different. In referral networking you NEED those people and you need for them to be on your side. Just like you pay a high priced automobile re-creationist to sell your side to the jury, you need a referral partner to sell your services. I'm not saying that you actually pay them with dollar bill currency; I suggest you pay them with referral currency. While they're out looking for ways to refer you to their friends, family & neighbors, you too should be looking for ways to "repay" them with referrals to your friends, family & neighbors.

To be a successful small to mid-sized practice law firm you need to get off your high-horse and make new friends. A reoccurring trait of lawyers is that they are, by their very nature, social people. They like being around people, meeting new people and building relationships with people. So why are most attorneys cave-dwellers? They awake every morning in their residential cave, get cleaned up, then eat, only to get into their cave on wheels and drive to another cave for 8+ hours a day, hop back into their portable cave and spend the rest of the night in their residential cave again. The cycle thus restarts and replays day after day after day—and then they can't figure out why they're not meeting anybody! For the "just starting out" law practice, this is a receipt for failure.

But there is hope! And it starts with you holding this article in your hands! The fact you're willing to read this, ingest the ideas and implement the strategies shows you're a cut above. Plus I'll let you in on a little secret: If you do even half the recommended practices, you'll be 90% ahead of your competition and 70% ahead of the "seasoned, big law" attorneys. See, when you work for a "big law" firm you don't have to find clients, worry about advertising or meet other people. What you do, however, have to worry about is making those atrocious billable hours which keep you chained to your desk. There are only a few attorneys who are really cut out for "big law" and for the rest: Their burnout rates are through the roof. Super, so you've

dedicated 10 years of your life to some obscure area of law and now that you've become accustomed to the fat paychecks and never having to find a client, what do you do?

The small to mid-sized law firm has the ability for you to stretch yourself into areas of law you might not otherwise get in "big law". But you have to stay afloat to enjoy those perks, right? So what do you do? You network! You get to know the florist, the barber, the life insurance agent and the plumber. Will all of them refer you all the time? Probably not. But what they will do is make you a more well rounded attorney so that you become the "go to" person for your client. Certainly the days of a one lawyer town are long gone, but that doesn't mean you can't still hold as much influence and persuasion as the attorney of yesteryear.

Find willing participants

No one is successful on their own. It takes an elaborate network of individuals, interested in your success, to help you achieve your long-term goal of running a successful law practice. So, are they mysterious elves seeking ways to help you make more money? Not really. They are not even your Mom! After all, think about the last time someone called you up and said "Hey, your Mom said I should give you a call!"...having trouble coming up with that most recent time? Why is that? Doesn't your mom love you? Support you? Want you (Little Johnny/Janey) to be successful? Of course she does! But she doesn't have a vested interest in your success the way your networking partners will. Equally, I'm not advocating (nor even suggesting) these people be paid employees whose sole purpose is to drum up a clientele base for your new business. First of all, you couldn't afford them right now. Second of all, even if you could afford to hire them, you are merely a paycheck to them! They're not going to have their heart in it the way you and another small business professional will, nor could that new hire have the heart—it's not their business—it's your business! You need to sell you! You can't get people to know, like and trust you without them getting some face time with you.

So how do you find willing participants? Get out of your cave and start meeting like-minded business professionals. Go to Chamber events and network. Get to your house of worship and civic organization meetings and find people with whom you enjoy talking to. Tell them you want to help them succeed in their business. Express to them that you believe you each share a common goal which is to make your respective business more successful—together. Who is going to say "No" to an offer like that? Once you've identified with whom you wish you work, start implementing these ideas to grow your referral partner's business, as they do the same for you. Isn't it a lot more fun doing a presentation with someone that you have respect for and enjoy their company, than merely going it alone?

You can be a successful new law firm, despite any economy, if you know how. I'm not denigrating advertising agencies, media outlets, or any other form of marketing. This method of word of mouth networking is merely one piece of the larger puzzle. But right now, you have more time than money, don't you? Why not take advantage of a little "free" advertising by

enlisting the help of others, while at the same time helping to ensure their success? This philosophy of “Givers Gain”[®] will take you a long way to a successful legal practice.