

The Role of Serendipity in [Law Firm Marketing](#)

by Stephen Seckler*



Relationship building is the cornerstone of growing a professional services practice. In the legal profession, building trusted relationships with potential clients and referral sources is particularly crucial. Clients hire lawyers they trust. Prospective clients will either trust you because they have gotten to know you over time or because someone they already trust has made a referral to you.

There are many different ways to build trusted relationships. For starters, it is important to get out of your office and make time to meet other professionals. But beyond that, there are many paths to success. For some, getting involved in a non-profit organization or trade group is a good way to meet potential referral sources. For others, being active in a recreational activity or hobby can be a powerful source of connections. And some people are just good at continually growing their networks by leveraging their existing networks (by spending a substantial amount of time socializing over breakfast, coffee or lunch.)

The best way to generate referrals is to think strategically about your network. Where you are most likely to meet the kinds of professionals who know your potential clients? Beyond that, it is also very helpful to plan out your involvement in a relatively deliberate and quantifiable way (e.g. decide you will meet at least one person for lunch or coffee every week; volunteer to spend 5 hours a month serving on a committee in a charitable organization).

Taking the time to write up a plan has a number of benefits. It forces you to think strategically about the most effective way to spend your time and it increases the likelihood that you will follow through. But when you get right down to actually having face to face conversations, it's time to drop the planning and focus instead on the here and now.

In my own experience, I am at my best when I drop my agenda. When I focus on learning more about someone (i.e. rather than thinking about how I can build a closer connection with them), good things happen. If I come to a networking function thinking there is a particular person that I must speak to, I'm usually disappointed. If I simply allow myself to talk to other attendees in a more organic way, it becomes much easier to connect. The pressure is gone and by simply listening, I sometimes discover that there is a way I can be helpful to a person. We uncover common interests and the connection I make is stronger than if I tried to orchestrate it more directly.

So think strategically about your relationship building. Set specific goals that relate to growing your network. But when you are actually in the saddle meeting people, allow conversation to flow and get yourself out of planning mode. You will come away with much better results and you will feel better about the way you comported yourself.

*[Coaching lawyers on law firm marketing and legal career issues](#) since 1997