

Making Connections

HOW TO MEET PEOPLE

The key to an endless stream of referrals for your business is to find referral partners. These are people who will know your clients before you know them. Think about this: If you're an estate-planning attorney, wouldn't a financial advisor and life insurance agent have the same group of clients that you would want to meet? If you're a divorce attorney, apartment managers, counselors and hair stylists are going to know your clients before you do.

It's all about the relationships. The relationship you build with someone, and how deep the relationship develops, is what will get you in the door every single time. Frankly, the better you know the person the more they will be willing to do for you to help make the prospect a closed sale. For example, if you know a Realtor extremely well, do you think he might be willing to set-up an appointment with a prospective client of yours AND attend the meeting with you? Do you think the prospective client, who has the relationship with the Realtor, would be more or less comfortable with you because the Realtor was there? Of course they would feel more comfortable!

Right now, you're nothing more than a shyster to this person. But you gain the credibility with the prospective client because the Realtor is there with you to lend his credibility. Once you impress the prospective client (and at the same time, the Realtor too) your credibility gets formed with the client and solidified with the Realtor. It's a double bonus!

What if your relationship with the barber isn't as strong as that of the Realtor? There are other ways the barber could refer and introduce you to the client. Perhaps it's a phone call? Maybe it's not even that elaborate, perhaps it's handing out your brochure on your behalf. Regardless, your ultimate goal is for your relationship with the barber to be as strong as it is with the Realtor. How? By doing things (explained later in the book) which are going to increase your visibility, your credibility and (hopefully) your profitability.

WHERE TO MEET PEOPLE

EVERYWHERE! Listen, you have to get out of your office and start meeting people. Meet as many people as you can. Go to your kid's soccer games, out with friends and with friends-of-friends, organize a class reunion, attend service organizations—just get out there. You won't meet people sitting in your office, your car and your house, and after all, isn't that where you've been spending 90 percent of your time these days? I get that you're tired after work, we all are! But your prospective clients and the people that are going to know your prospective client aren't going to be in your office, your car or your home (well, I *hope* they're not in your home or car).

Which area of practice do you want to grow or focus your business? Below are three popular practice areas to get your mind thinking about this topic:

- If it's estate planning, you'd better be knocking on doors of every senior center, retirement home, activity center, and PTA group. Where are your prospective clients hanging out? Why am I recommending these places? Because this is where you can start meeting and speaking to your future clients. Seniors understand they need their estate planning in place, but they do nothing about it—frequently until it's too late. They want to address it, but they don't know who to trust. What if you were there on a semi-regular basis and they knew you, liked you and trusted you enough to start asking your questions about the estate planning process? Think they'd be more willing to address their estate planning needs if they didn't have to pick up the phone book and hope for the best? PTA organizations are great ways to get in front of parents who have an active interest in their children. If they have the time and inclination to get involved with the PTA they're going to see the value of having their children protected through estate planning. What about volunteering at the local humane society? People who spend volunteer hours there are animals lovers, but have their taken the time to adequately address the needs of Fido if something should happen to them?
- If you're a criminal-defense attorney, are you frequenting the local watering holes? Would the bartender know whom they should recommend to their best patron who recently got busted for a DUI and possession of marijuana? Are you talking to parents, informing them that their children have certain legal rights? Getting in good with one well-connected parent could open your practice up to an entire school of students and their parents (who are willing to pay your fees to protect little Junior from that Minor In Possession charge from needing to be disclosed in a college application). Many states are beginning to legalize the use of medical marijuana: do the stores opening up for legal distribution know who to turn to if the police do a raid and allege the store owner is acting outside the purview of the statutory law? You need to get into the minds of your potential client and figure out where he would be hanging out. This doesn't mean start associating with known criminal associates; remember we do have state bar ethics and professional responsibilities to consider.
- Is business law your primary focus? If so, great! You'd better have a membership with your local chamber of commerce. But more than having a membership, you had better be in attendance at those monthly mixers they put on. Does your state department of commerce/labor have a website which lists newly formed LLCs, C/S-Corps and partnerships? If so, I would recommend a friendly "welcome to business" letter introducing yourself, your services provided and why they should consider you for their legal business needs. Equally, your church, charities and civic organizations are going to be filled with local business owners—get involved! Listen, don't worry about Big Law coming in and sweeping up your prospective clients, these newly established businesses are not going to have the need (or bankroll) to afford the large law firms when first starting out. If you can get the small business owners trust now, you'll have it forever. New businesses appreciate when someone takes a chance on them and they remember it as they grow.

There are as many other practice areas as there are letters on this keyboard. You will know your typical client better than I. What I'm trying to get you to start thinking about is identifying your target client and figuring out where to meet him. If you do divorce, bankruptcy or tax law, there may not be a logical place for your prospective clients to "hang out," it may just be a matter of meeting someone who says, "Oh, hey, my cousin is looking for someone who does what you do". But you won't meet them if you're sitting at home on your couch all weekend! If you are in one those areas of practice where your clients don't have a logical place to associate, building relationships with business professions who WILL associate with your future client is essential to having a successful word-of-mouth strategy.