

Memo to Senior Partners:

Motivating Younger Lawyers to Generate New Business

By Larry Bodine, Esq.

“The way to motivate people is to capture their imagination with an idea.”

As you may have noticed, there is a generation gap in your law firm. You or your colleagues would like to plan your exit strategy, but the younger generation is not ready to step up to become the new leadership.

The associates and income partners may resent being asked to generate new businesses. Some of the associates don't even care if they become a partner! The income partners don't have their own clients and say it's your fault their hours are low because you're not giving them enough assignments.



How do you motivate these "drone" lawyers?

As you'll see, there is a way to spur them to do business development activities, and even get them to make more money for you.

Contrast that with how they grew up:

The key to understanding the younger generation is that they grew up very differently from you.

They grew up in the best of times. Their parents had second homes, jet skis and SUVs.

They always had their own rooms with their own TVs. They didn't need to share.

The Vietnam War is ancient history. Kids today don't even face the draft. The critical events of their lifetime were 9-11 and the Iraq Wars.

Their world is culturally diverse. They never remember a time when only white people were on TV. Family vacations were in foreign countries reached by jet.

They grew up with cell phones, instant messaging and text

messages. E-mail is something that not just older people use. They don't buy records; they download music and listen to it on iPods. And they like hip-hop music with singers like Lady Gaga, Chris Brown and Alicia Keys.

They get their news online and watch videos on YouTube. They use Wikipedia as their encyclopedia, and look up phone numbers on Google.

And here's the key difference: *law practice to them is just a job*. They don't view it as one of the learned professions (law, medicine and clergy). It's a place to make money and, yes, pay off their loans. They view you, senior partner, to be self-righteous, a workaholic, and clueless with technology.

The Solution: Make the practice of law cool again.

You need to bring back the élan of Perry Mason getting a confession on the witness stand, or Paul Newman winning in "The Verdict," or John Travolta as a personal injury lawyer representing families whose children died of leukemia in "A

Civil Action.” What they see now are slimy lawyers played by George Clooney in “Michael Clayton,” and Matthew McConaughey as a lawyer who operates out of his car in “Lincoln Lawyer.”

The younger lawyers already understand that running a law firm is a business. They’ll take a pay cut to work at a different place that they think is a happening office that’s fun to work in. What they need to understand that being a lawyer is a great profession, and that being a lawyer comes with a lot of respect and authority.

Where to start?

Show some leadership. Close the firm at 4:30 one day and take everyone out for a happy hour. Relax the dress code and let people work in business casual clothes. Be somebody they want to work with. Share your strategy of a case and tell the young lawyers the importance of where they fit in, so they feel a sense of teamwork. People will stay at a firm if they like the people they work for, especially if they admire and look up to you. Becoming a leader builds camaraderie and positions you as a leader.

Be a mentor. Take a serious look at the next generation and pick out the lawyer you’d like to groom to turn into a rainmaker. You and your protégé are going to market together. Your young lawyers won’t succeed in business development unless they have a silver-haired lawyer with business experience show them how it’s done.

Before you meet with a prospective client, ask your protégé to research the company and come up with five good questions you can both ask during the meeting.

Take the young lawyer on meetings with prospective clients and have your protégé handle the follow-up contacts.

At the meeting with the potential client, let the younger lawyer hear what you say and see what you do to attract the client. Give your protégé a speaking role at the meeting. Debrief the meeting afterwards to point up the lessons drawn from it.

Introduce the younger lawyer to the key contacts at your clients. Arrange a “how’s business?” meeting with the client, and ask the client to bring along some of their young people.

Assign your protégé to get to know people his or her own age at the client. Afterward, de-brief the young lawyer about what’s going on at the client company.

Skill-build and educate. Alongside this type of mentoring, there are a host of ways you can build the skills of a younger lawyer...and stir the kind of excitement and comfort with business development that will prove invaluable for both of you.

When a younger lawyer brings in a new file, find a way to make him or her be the handling lawyer. Having responsibility makes a young lawyer feel important.

You are probably overcommitted with organizations and associations you belong to. Select one that you will transfer to the younger lawyer. Attend one of the trade associations meetings together with your protégé, make some initial introductions, and then give your protégé the responsibility to get new clients from the organization.

Ask the younger lawyer to write up the important elements of a matter he or she worked on, particularly one that other clients (or prospects) would be interested in. Then, polish it together. Direct the young lawyer to stress the problems the client was facing and the special value the legal team delivered in that case. Publish the piece jointly in a firm newsletter and other publications to give your protégé public recognition.

Tell your protégé that you want to present a web seminar, record a video or start a blog together. You will supervise the content of the marketing vehicle. But you want the younger lawyer to figure out the technology, and have a speaking/writing role as well.

Create a personal relationship. Ask the younger lawyer why they decided to go to law school, and what they like best about law practice. Open up, and give your protégé the same information about yourself. Invite your protégé and his spouse to your home for dinner. Young people want to be inspired and are looking for role models.

Recommend that they take a vacation to Washington, D.C. and see the original copy of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Make them realize why law is one of the great professions. Certainly, running a law firm is a business. But give them an emotional reason to be a rainmaker at your law firm.



Larry Bodine, Esq. is a business development advisor who helps law firms generate revenue and get new business. He has advised 250+ law firms over the last 20 years. He can be reached at Lbodine@LawMarketing.com or at 630.942.0977.