

Rainmaking

Getting Personal: How to Customize Your Business Development Strategy

SUSAN SALTONSTALL DUNCAN | Even in this sluggish marketplace and economy, you must still focus on generating business. However, if your business development plan requires doing things you really don't like, or that make you feel uncomfortable, you'll avoid following the plan whenever you can. Solution: Tailor it to your personal preferences and strengths where feasible.

The greatest benefits of developing and executing a customized, personal business development strategy is that it allows you (1) to get more business you like from clients you enjoy and who can pay your fee and (2) to use approaches that are most comfortable, effective and rewarding for you.

Taking into account your personal preferences, strengths and personality traits can, overall, help you reap the best returns on your efforts. Here are pointers on how to proceed.

Identify Your Ideal Clients and Matters

Being focused in your strategy allows you to be more successful at generating the type of clients and legal work you most enjoy. You will not neces-

sarily enjoy working with all of your clients, of course, but your goal here is to find at least a little more work that fits your profile of "the ideal."

To begin, make a list of your clients over the past three years. Give each one a ranking of A, B or C according to how much you've enjoyed working with them. Be careful to consider whether it was because of the person who was your primary contact, the type of work you did, or a combination of both.

Now make a list of the qualities that comprise your grade-A clients. Here are examples of the things you could include:

- Is a smart business owner or executive who needs you for legal advice
- Relies on you for business judgment and counsel
- Trusts you to run with things
- Likes to be kept informed at every turn
- Has an in-house counsel who appreciates your perspectives
- Is a prompt decision maker who

doesn't have to get separate approvals

- Appreciates your value and pays your fees without questioning them
- Is a status client who can and does make good referrals

Next, consider other factors that make clients and matters ideal to you. One factor that may be significant for you is whether you prefer working with an individual, business, government agency, nonprofit, entrepreneur or a mix of certain types. Here are other possibilities to consider:

- Has ongoing or expanding legal needs
- Is in a specific industry or occupation
- Is in a growth area
- Has sophisticated legal issues
- Needs soup-to-nuts legal and business advice
- Is local (say within a two-hour drive)
- Networks with other community or civic leaders and prospects

Be aware that once you complete your lists and devise your plan accordingly, you may not be able to focus solely on your ideals since some of them will not help you achieve other goals—which in this economy may well include stability and amount of revenue.

Assess Past Successes and Failures

Many people take a generic approach to business development by using a mix of steps in each of the following areas:

- Client entertainment
- Referral source relationships



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- One-on-one prospecting
- Article writing
- Speeches
- Organizational involvements
- Community activities

It is better, however, to use approaches that specifically take advantage of your strengths and interests—approaches that are also most likely to put you in front of those who can hire you or provide you with direct referrals to decision makers.

Here's how to make it happen. Compile a list of the approaches that you've used in the past three years. Evaluate your comfort level with each approach *and* the effectiveness of each—as in, did it result in any new business, get you a referral or expand your network of prospects? Be careful to consider whether a given approach might have been a good one for you—for example, making a presentation—but the topic or the audience wasn't targeted enough to generate the right interest and leads.

Ideally, your rainmaking plan will be comprised of steps that won't seem like a chore. In fact, you should consider how to meld some of your personal passions and activities with your business development goals and action steps.

Know Yourself, and Know Your Clients

There are a number of personality self-assessment tools that can help you better understand your personal preferences, styles and temperament. The way you see the world, approach a problem or task, manage others and interact generally will impact the way others react to you and thus affect your success. Equally important in business is to understand the personality traits and temperaments of your clients and those you are courting to be your

clients. You can observe these through body language, the pace and style of their speech, their dress, interests, work styles and other similar attributes.

Understanding your own traits and those of others should help you become better at managing client relationships and engaging in more productive selling interactions. For example, if you are a traditionalist (as many lawyers are), you will be most comfortable being in control, organized and able to rely on facts, details and specifics. You are likely driven by deadlines and the pressure to get tasks done.

Suppose, though, that your client or prospect is much more of a relationship-oriented person, someone to whom rapport and trust are of utmost importance. Such people do not want to feel rushed or asked to as-

sume a risk, so you cannot hurry them or appear impatient. They won't be as impressed with your track record or fact-centered rationale, but more with who you know and who referred them to you. While you may consider wining and dining a waste, they will likely appreciate social time with you.

Not all approaches to marketing and business development are equally effective for everyone. In fact, the most effective business development happens when you take *yourself* into account—this includes your personality style, the approaches that work best for you, and the types of clients and matters you like most. When you put that together with an understanding of your clients' and prospects' styles and preferences and current market trends and opportunities, you should have a recipe for success. **LP**

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