

Ask the Coach

By Gary Mitchell; Managing Director, GEM Communications Inc.

December 2008

Q. "What can we do as a firm to encourage business development at all levels?" (Posed by a marketing partner of a large regional firm.)

A. This is a great question. I think the place to start is to help everyone within your firm understand what business development is and what their roles are.

Here's my take on it: Business development is everything you do to connect with a client, including:

- client relationship management and service;
- client communications;
- relationship building (internally and externally);
- raising profile (individual lawyers and the firm);
- hosting events;
- attending events;
- speaking at events;
- writing articles, and so on.

Everyone in your firm has a key role to play. Let's take a look at those roles:

Everyone (staff and lawyers): Everyone contributes to the experience your clients have of your firm, either directly or indirectly. In fact, your most vulnerable business and client development strategy actually lies in the roles that indirectly contribute to client experience. Help them see themselves in the client service lifeline and help them understand the effect they have on the client, even if they never meet the client.

This also requires education on the part of your firm. Everyone from the managing partner to the mailroom workers should understand your brand promise, the history of your firm and its differentiating factors. Everyone should know

the "elevator speech" to be able to effectively represent your firm. There are opportunities out there for all members of your firm to attract new business. Arm your team with the knowledge they need to do so.

Senior partners: This group should be actively seeking new business and continuing to raise their profile in their target audience. This includes asking current clients for referrals and looking for cross-selling opportunities with other lawyers at the firm.

Senior partners should actively support a business development culture by:

- introducing their client team to their clients;
- co-writing articles with juniors to help them raise their profile;
- including juniors in client presentations; and
- bringing them to events and introducing them around.

Given the experience and credibility of this group, mentoring and grooming the next

Everyone contributes to the experience your clients have of your firm...in fact, the most vulnerable business and client development strategy lies in the roles that indirectly contribute to client experience.



Gary Mitchell

GEM Communications Inc.

Suite 675

142-757 West Hastings St.

Vancouver, BC

V6C 1A1

(604) 669-5235

www.gemcommunications.ca

©2008 GEM Communications Inc.

Ask the Coach: December 2008

generation of lawyers at your firm is a very important part of this role.

Senior associates/junior partners: If this group has not already done so, I strongly recommend each senior associate and junior partner create a business plan for his or her practice. This will help them identify and fully understand their target audience and how to reach them. The firm should expect these to be completed yearly, and offer up the support they need to complete them. By support, I mean having at minimum a template to fill in that guides them through the key categories for planning.

Then ensure marketing staff and/or senior partners are available to help them if they need it. Once the plan is in place, this group will need ongoing support to implement it. Consider how members of your firm can provide this ongoing support and look outside to coaches and consultants if you simply don't have the resources internally. Key business development activities at this stage are likely to be related to raising profile in key target markets and developing relationships with key clients.

Junior associates: Business development for this group looks like this: They should be meeting as many partners and senior associates as they can within the firm. Act like a sponge and ask lots of questions. Take an active interest in the client and his or her business. Be proactive and ask more senior lawyers to introduce them to some of their clients.

As they continue through their CLE, encourage them to create a dual purpose for the learning. Some of the research they are required to conduct could provide content for articles, so encourage them to approach senior partners to co-author an article or two, and begin to raise their profile.

Marketing: I don't have to advise marketing professionals what their role is in business development, but here's some advice nonetheless: In these times of economic uncertainty, cutbacks in both tactics and staff are likely to occur. They will likely occur with the tactical elements of marketing: web site enhancements, collateral material development, events, and so on.

Think practical. Think tangible. How can you help each of your lawyer groups establish and execute their business plans? Shift your focus to individual lawyer support.

Firmwide support: Once everyone understands his or her role, provide systematic support. This could include skill development workshops and training, individual coaching and mentoring. And provide incentives. This could mean a change to your compensation system or a series of rewards and bonuses.

Help your team members understand what they need to do and teach them the skills they will require – then reward them for doing it.

This article first appeared in the December 2008 issue of The Canadian Bar Association's PracticeLink.

Gary Mitchell is a business development coach and the managing director of GEM Communications, where he leads an international team of consultants, coaches and trainers who assist lawyers and law firms prepare for the future, one leader at a time. Gary can be reached at gary@gemcommunications.ca or 604-669-5235.



MAKE RAIN. We show you how.™