

## Ask the Coach

By Gary Mitchell; Managing Director, GEM Communications Inc.

October 2008

**Q.** “How can I leverage my firm to achieve my goals?”

**A.** This is a great question. When we’re coaching lawyers on how to build their practices, we often help them identify opportunities to more fully utilize their internal support teams. The following areas are where we see the most underutilization:

- your assistant;
- your mentor;
- your practice group leader;
- your managing partner;
- marketing department;
- administration;
- library;
- recruitment committee;
- IT, and;
- human resources.

Where you need support the most is likely to correspond with where you are in your career and the size of your practice. The best and most effective approach is to build relationships with key individuals one at a time.

It really all comes down to your ability to engage in **internal relationship building**. There is likely a gold mine of talent waiting to be engaged. It is up to you to start engaging it, when it will help you the most.

Remember the four steps to business development? They apply just as successfully to internal relationship building. You need to **FIND** the people who can and want to help you. Then you have to **BUILD** relationships with them to instill loyalty and commitment. Next you have to **DISCOVER** what they are capable of, interested in, and how they can best help you. And finally instead of Offer, you

have to **ASK** for their help. This works whether you’re building relationships with staff, peers, juniors or seniors.

So let’s break it down and go a little deeper into the steps.

### **FIND**

This might not be as easy as it sounds. There are two things to do here:

**Start with a practice plan.** It does not have to be perfect or finalized but it will help you be clear about what kind of support you need.

Then, **identify the individuals** within your firm who may have the potential to help you. The key here is ‘may have the potential’. It’s in the **BUILD** step where you’ll determine if they want to help, have a service mindset, service attitude, and the ability and expertise to help.

### **BUILD**

Just like with potential clients, spend the time here getting to know them and what opportunities lie ahead to work together. You’re looking for an attitude here. Are they interested in helping? Do they see the big picture?

**Don’t be afraid to get a little personal** by taking the time to get to know them. Everyone has a story and people like to be heard. Find out what motivates them. What frustrates

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them? What career aspirations they have? How they like to be recognized. Learn about their families and hobbies or interests. Be genuine. If you're not genuinely interested – they'll know.

Taking the time to do these things and it will go a long way to showing that you actually care about them and not just about what they can do for you. It also helps you filter out those who may not be interested in helping you reach your goals.

### DISCOVER

From the BUILD step, you've already determined that this person is in a position to help you and wants to help you. Now it's about discovering just how they can, and what's in it for them if they do. Is there an opportunity for you to help them achieve their goals while aligning them with your own? **This is truly about building partnerships**, so find out how you can do that.

### ASK

By now you understand who and how this person can help you. You also understand how their goals may be aligned with your own. You have specific requests and timelines and you have taken the time to get to know them on a personal as well as professional level. All that is left to do is **ASK FOR HELP**.

Here's what we've heard from our professional clients about how they want to be engaged:

**Engage them from the beginning** and don't wait until the last minute to ask for their help. The law firm management professionals I know do want to help but they need the lead time to understand your needs and act accordingly.

This also allows them to provide you with feedback on your plan or approach. Ask them for ideas and feedback, how they think they can help you and what would be of interest to them. People like to feel that they are making a contribution to any organization.

**Be specific.** Know what and when you need something and why. This will ensure buy-in a lot faster and help the individual understand your situation.

**Be open to constructive feedback** as these individuals are typically highly trained or

experienced in their respective areas and will have a lot to offer in the way of feedback on your plan or approaches and tactics.

**Rewards and recognition** go a long way in establishing loyalty and sustainability. When they have done something for you that you have appreciated, let them know.

Try this approach. Let me know how you make out in building relationships and partnerships internally.

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

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