

Ask the Coach

By Gary Mitchell; Managing Director, GEM Communications Inc.

September 2008

Q. “I’m a 4th year call—what can I be doing in the way of business development?”

A. This is a great question and you are not alone in asking it. First, let me say that I am a strong proponent of planning. **I would suggest you start your business development efforts by creating a practice/business plan.**

Alternatively you could simply use the ‘random acts of business development’ approach, but don’t expect to get the results you’re looking for. Instead, expect to become very frustrated with your lack of progress and revert back to simply complying with your billable hour requirements. In three to four years you will feel even more stressed out as you approach partnership not having your own book of business

So what does a practice plan look like? At a minimum, here are some things to consider for your plan:

- what are you currently doing?;
- are you in a practice area you enjoy?;
- what do you need to learn about your target audience and how do you reach them?;
- what are some trends in that industry?;
- what types of work do you like doing?;
- who are the people you like working with?;
- what is your motivation to succeed?;
- what skills do you need to develop?;
- who in your firm can you go to for help?;
- how can you maximize the talents of your marketing department or administrator?;
- where do you want your practice to be in five and ten years?; and,
- what do you want to accomplish in your career?

Some of these questions may be tough for you to answer—that is the point, to **become laser like in your approach.** Let’s face it, it’s not like you have a lot of free time on your hands. Having a well developed career plan will **keep you focused on what you need to do in order to reach your goals.** Once this is in place, you are ready to implement.

Understanding the Approach

In *Effective Business Development in Four Simple Steps*, I outlined the four steps to business development; **Find, Build, Discover, and Offer.** At this stage of your career you already have a good foundation of contacts internally within your firm and externally (primarily current clients). **Your approach to business development should be two fold:**

1. **Continue to find more people who need your services.**
2. **Build current relationships to determine further needs.**

So where do you start? I recommend starting with your current clients. You already have well developed relationships here. Starting here serves two purposes. First, it strengthens current client relationships (creating your solid base) and, second, it allows you to try new

Use the ‘random acts of business development’ approach and expect to become very frustrated with your lack of progress.



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: September 2008

approaches and tactics with people you already know.

As an added value there is likely to be some low hanging fruit here allowing you to achieve some quick wins building confidence in these new approaches and encouraging you to continue.

If we go back to the four steps; Find, Build, Discover, Offer, with your current clients, you have already achieved the first step and you're well on your way through the second step-build. Here is what I suggest you do.

BUILD

- Offer on-site seminars for their employees offering valuable information.
- Get to know your clients and their needs with informal social events. Get to know them more on a personal level; their goals; their challenges; family; hobbies; points of interest between the two of you.

DISCOVER

- Follow this up with a more formal style 'discovery' meeting to determine potential needs; find out how you can help them. If there is anything you don't know about your clients '**ASK THEM**'.
- Confirm those needs.

OFFER

- Ask for permission to offer solutions to those specific needs.
- Offer them

Finding New Contacts - Starting from Scratch

Finding people who need your services or making it easier for them to find you may be simpler than you think. It is simply a matter of getting in front of your target audience.

To do this effectively you must first understand everything you can about this audience. You can use the approach outlined above to help you with this. As you build relationships and discover needs with current clients, you can use this research to better understand the needs of your target audience as a whole.

So, how do you get in front of them?

- Write articles for publications that your target audience reads. Don't know what they read? '**ASK THEM**'.
- Offer to provide 'value added' seminars on-site (just as you did with current clients). Don't know what would be of value? '**ASK THEM**'.
- Offer to speak at industry conferences and meetings. Don't know what's topical? '**ASK THEM**'.
- Identify associates and partners within your firm you like to work with. Meet with them to help determine cross-selling opportunities.

It's important to mention that what I have outlined above can be used as an approach for senior associates and partners as well. Quite simply you want to be looking for ways to FIND, BUILD, DISCOVER, and OFFER. Start with a clear plan, follow through on it and have some fun.

You might have figured out by now that you have already been engaged in some aspects of business development without even realizing it. I truly believe that in order to effectively serve your clients you must also be good at sales. You cannot help people if you don't understand their needs. People that have a talent for sales genuinely are interested in helping people. They take the time to understand the needs of each individual before offering solutions. Become good at that, and you will have a thriving career.

This article first appeared in the September 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.™