

Bringing down the wall

By Gary Mitchell

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You know - the wall you feel but can't see. The disconnect that exists between your management and the lawyers within your firm. Do you often feel intimidated by the lawyers you work for? They are smart, but so are you. **They know law, and you know the business of law.**

Do they know and understand marketing; HR, staff morale, business development, budgets and finance? They might have an LL.B, but you have degrees and experience in Business Administration, CMA designations, and Marketing. Don't assume they know what they are doing when it comes to the business of law. It must be frustrating to take instruction from your lawyers when you know the possible negative impacts of the plan. Don't be afraid of posing questions to your lawyers. Here's a new approach you may not have considered before. It works. Try it out and let me know how it works for you.



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Treat your lawyers like clients.

Look at it from this point of view. When a vendor or outside supplier approaches you what are some of the questions they ask? What's working for you? What's not working for you? What is your current situation? Where do you want to help get the firm? What are your objectives? What is your budget? What is your time line? What form of support do you need? And the list can go on and on. The vendor is trying to understand you and your goals. If they wish to serve you, they must first understand your needs. Staff and management should take the same approach with lawyers. Treat them like clients. Whether it's a budget, advertisement, policy issue, marketing plan or recruitment effort, one must ask the questions in order to fulfill the lawyer's expectations and create mutually beneficial results.

Discovery. Just as your lawyers will go into a discovery meeting and ask question after

question to gain understanding; perspective; and knowledge, you too can use that same approach to create a winning strategy. Here's how. The next time a lawyers comes into your office with a request or idea; don't simply agree to undertake it. No, I am not suggesting you become disagreeable and hard to work with.

What I am suggesting is learn more. Get to the heart of their needs.

This is a process we teach lawyers to go through when dealing with prospects and clients. Why they are suggesting this idea, what is the goal or goals, what impact will it create, what specific measurable results are they looking to achieve etc., what is the outcome they seek? Help them to understand how much time this will take. What amount of follow up is required on their behalf? What other supportive measures might be useful to include in order to achieve maximum results? They don't always understand you and your role, and you might not always understand their needs. Discovery helps you bridge the gap and bring down the wall.

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What are some of the benefits of this approach? You will encourage not discourage ideas. You will fully understand where they are coming from and be in a better position to help them. Chances are greater that the end results will be more successful as they have been fully thought through. Instead of dismissing the idea, you are teaching them how to look at the bigger picture. Instead of butting heads with the lawyer you are strengthening your relationship. This leads to a greater sense of trust - upon which you will rely when it's time for you to pitch your ideas to them. And when you can pitch new ideas that are adopted, you have a greater impact on the future of the firm.

Before pitching a new approach or idea. This is where discovery may serve you the best. Do you ever experience push back when presenting a new idea to one or a group of your lawyers? I know, rhetorical question. Try taking some time using the discovery approach to help your client (lawyer) see for themselves why they would need this new approach or idea. So instead of having to pitch, you are clarifying needs. In the end it's almost like the lawyer or lawyers are coming up with the idea in the first place. And once again there is opportunity to build trust and strengthen your relationship with your lawyers.

This approach works. Let me know how it works for you. Send me an email with your feedback on this approach.

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