

Business & Careers

It is essential to build relationships on the way up



Gary Mitchell
The Coach

When your destination is partnership, there are three key areas to focus on to steer your career toward it. They are: developing your legal skills; building internal relationships, and increasing your own book of business. For this column, I am going to focus on the latter two areas.

The value of the relationships you build internally in your firm cannot be underestimated. Are you leveraging the collective knowledge of the professionals who work at your firm, such as assistants and marketing pros? How about other lawyers, whether they are seniors, juniors or peers?

Get to know the individuals on your support team. That means everyone from your assistant, to marketing to administration to IT to finance to HR, and the librarian. Find out what exactly they do. Find out what their frustrations are and if there anything you can personally do to help them. Get to know if they would be interested in doing more for the team.

One of my clients simply asked her receptionist if she would be interested in taking some additional marketing work. To her surprise, her receptionist jumped at the opportunity.

When approaching other lawyers at the firm, take the same approach as you did with the staff. Get to know them, their goals, frustrations, how you can help them and how you can work together.

Get to know what their ideal work is. What is their plan for partnership? At any stage of your career, you can begin to build relationships and organic teams (people you like to work with who are like-minded and on the same path, either ahead or behind you).

What are you doing in the way of non-billable contributions to your firm? To what committees can you offer contributions? How can you support student and/or recruitment efforts? Is there some form of community work that you can do that would position the firm well with its clients?

What types of leadership roles can you take on within your practice groups? Is there someone more junior than you that you can mentor? What other ways can you personally contribute to the success of your firm? And if you don't know, ask.

When it comes to business development, first create a plan for your practice. Understand your target audience. At this point, you have likely narrowed your choices of practice area or areas. Now you need to become effective at finding them or making it easier for them to find you by getting in front of them and building your profile.



MATTJEACOCK / ISTOCKPHOTO.COM



Create organic teams among yourselves. Choose a leader. Create the cross selling. Go and meet those clients and do the same type of discovery.

Gary Mitchell
On Trac Coach

Simple tactics include joining associations that target your market. If you don't know, ask your best current clients what events they attend. Get involved in those associations by volunteering. Offer to speak at these events. Write articles for association publications and others that target your audience. Again, ask your best clients what they read. Provide on-site seminars to current clients and prospects. Look for alliances with other like-minded professional service providers who also target your audience.

Keeping your clients happy is also just important as getting new ones. Do high quality work and communicate with them regularly. Make a list of current clients that you wish to develop further (that means you would like to be able to offer more services to them).

Set up meetings with those clients and do full discoveries into their needs, challenges, goals, reporting structure, where would there be ways to provide added value, what are the types of things they like about how you serve them, what could you be doing better, what are some of their other law firms not doing right, what are they doing right.

When you have confirmed their needs with them, make introductions to other lawyers who would be capable of taking care of those needs. This is called cross-serving, and it requires a strategy. Start by identifying other like-minded lawyers within your firm with whom you enjoy

working. Find out what their goals are (you may already know from the work you did before). Find out what their clients may need of you. Let them know

what your clients might need of them.

Create organic teams among yourselves. Choose a leader. Create the cross selling. Go and meet those clients and do the same type of discovery.

Developing your team goes a long way in effectively serving your clients. Look at the needs of your clients and determine what you need in the way of people and skills for the team you are building to serve them.

Take the time to meet with juniors, find out if your needs meet their goals and see if there is a fit. Now you will be in the mentor role.

Take the time to develop your team so that they can surpass the needs of your clients. Share your vision with each member one-on-one and help them see themselves in that vision-what will their role be in it and serving the clients. Find out what areas they would like to develop and delegate certain tasks to them. Help them develop skills as required. Lead by example and always be available for support. Provide regular feedback, constructive and positive. Be thankful to them for their contribution.

These are areas that most firms look at when considering associates for partners. It boils down to this: are you one of us? Do you get along well with others? Are you making a contribution to the success of the firm in some way?

Do the above and you will have built a sustainable practice and be well on your way to equity partnership.

Gary Mitchell is principal at On Trac Coach where he works with lawyers, law clerks and paralegals across Canada. He is also co-founder of 'Legal A Team,' a marketing and management alliance focused on providing big firm support to smaller law firms and solo practice lawyers. He can be reached at gary@ontraccoach.com or 604-669-5235.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Littler, the world's largest labour and employment law practice representing management, is pleased to welcome

Partner Sarah Crossley
to its growing Toronto office.

Sarah brings extensive experience representing clients in:

- Human Rights Proceedings and Arbitrations
- Disability Accommodation
- Performance Management and Termination
- Collective Agreement Administration
- Employment Policies and Agreements
- Wrongful Dismissal Litigation

Please join us in welcoming Sarah as a key member of our team.

Littler LLP
Employment & Labour Law Solutions Worldwide®

Yonge Richmond Centre
Suite 1404 | 151 Yonge Street
Toronto, ON M5C 2W7 | Canada
littler.com