

Business & Careers

Growth can require change



Gary Mitchell
The Coach

Over the last four months, I have given you the direction to create or enhance a business plan for your practice. You have all the information you need to move forward. So what are you waiting for? Are you ready to grow your practice? If you are, that is likely going to include making some changes in the way you do business development. This column serves you in determining if you are ready for change.

According to noted psychologists James Prochaska and Carlo DiClemente, there are six stages of change: pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance and relapse. I will give you an overview of each stage in order for you to determine where you are in changing the way you approach business development and the growth of your practice.

Pre-contemplation

People in the pre-contemplation stage do not even consider the need for change. These people have no obvious need or good reason to alter the way they are doing business development. Or perhaps they are in denial about their situation. This often occurs with lawyers who find themselves (for various reasons) with a diminishing practice. They are unable to accept that things have changed. Most likely they are so focused on their immediate situation (stuck), that they can't see the forest for the trees. They often become paralyzed with fear. If you are at this stage, you are not ready to make changes. You are not ready to engage in new or different business development approaches.

Contemplation

People who are thinking about making a change are aware that something has to change but are not in a rush to make it happen. Perhaps the situation is not yet dire. Or the situation has just recently changed and there hasn't been enough time for the reality of it to sink in. And these people will have a difficult time figuring out how and where to start making changes. There could be any number of variables here. In my experience, there are a lot of lawyers who fall into this category. While you might be a little closer to making changes, you are not quite ready for change.

Preparation

In the preparation stage, people are often trying things out. They may have already attempted some changes and either failed or had very little success. They have gone from thinking about making changes to actually trying some new things. Perhaps more networking, or joining associations. Without having proven strategies and going it alone, you will make a lot of mistakes. This may cause you to become discouraged. While you are ready for change at this stage, you would likely benefit with some help in making those

changes. Don't feel you have to do it all on your own. Reach out and look for people who can help you make the appropriate changes to your business development strategies.

Action

At this stage you have already been engaged in change. You will have been building new habits and approaches for about six months. You will have already experienced some success. But perhaps you will reach a plateau. And perhaps your motivation will wane. Because you have experienced some success there is the danger of thinking you have done enough. Perhaps you are busy in your practice and find it challenging to find the time to continue with your new business development efforts. Or, you might be thinking how do I take this to the next level? This is exactly the time you need to continue, so that you will remain busy next month, six months from now, and next year. This is the stage where you could benefit the most from getting some help to keep you focused, motivated, in action, and getting even greater results for your efforts.

Maintenance

The maintenance stage is what we strive for in working with our clients. This is where the likelihood of stumbling or reverting to old habits is least likely to occur. You are pretty solid in your new habits and it's been paying off. You have grown your practice and continue to do so. More files continue to come in. You have become addicted to success and will do everything you can to keep this momentum. Look for peers who are at the same stage. Consider holding a monthly meeting to keep each other accountable. Basically if you have arrived at this stage, my advice is to do whatever you can do to keep moving forward and avoid what could follow.

Relapse

Change can be difficult to sustain. A relapse can happen at any time and for any number of reasons. With all the time and effort you have already put into growing your practice you want to avoid this stage at all costs. And if you do find yourself reverting to old habits, what can you do to get yourself back on the winning track?

Speaking of asking for help

Lawyers often feel that asking for help is a sign of weakness. It's actually the opposite. Asking for help is a sign of strength. It means you are serious about making changes and growing your practice and will do what it takes (like an Olympic athlete), to get you where you want to go.

Take some time to consider where you are? What should be your next steps? Where do you go from here? If you find yourself identifying with this article, perhaps you are at the stage where you are ready to try new things, make some changes to your business development strategies. If you are, why not give me a call. I can help you grow your practice.

Gary Mitchell is author of Raindance: The Business Development Guidebook for Lawyers and principal and founder of On Trac Coach. Contact: gary@ontraccoach.com or 604-669-5235.

**MINDEN
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BARRISTERS & SOLICITORS
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