

Networking- An Effective Strategy For Growing Your Law Practice

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Word of mouth marketing is one of the most effective ways to grow your law practice. There are two ways to increase word of mouth marketing: first, you must provide a remarkable service (something that is worth commenting on) and second, you must accelerate awareness of who you are and the value you provide.

To accelerate people's awareness of who you are and what value you provide, it is essential to build relationships with other professionals and referral sources. One strategy for building relationships is through networking.

Unfortunately, when people hear the word "networking" they do not respond with excitement and enthusiasm. Images of forced conversation, wasted time, phoniness, collecting business cards and attending functions you do not want to attend come to mind.

In truth, the essence of networking is none of the above. The true meaning of networking involves building relationships by giving to others and helping them succeed.

To be successful at building professional relationships, it is critical to focus on cultivating mutually beneficial, give and take, "win-win" relationships. The focus is on helping the other person to meet his or her goals. The mistake many "net workers" make is focusing on their own success and how the other person can help them meet their goals.

Networking is absolutely essential in building a strong law practice since a large percentage of referrals result from established relationships. Think about your top referral sources. In most cases, top referrals come from a relationship you have created by getting to know someone. All things being equal, people will more frequently refer to professionals they know, like and trust.

Here are seven steps you can take to increase your networking success:

1. Get involved with organizations, committees or projects in which you have great interest or skill.
2. At any networking event, show an authentic interest in the person or people with whom you are conversing. Once the awareness shifts away from you and your goals to them and their goals, a connection is made with the other person and trust begins to develop.
3. Ask questions. When you have an encounter with other individuals, you have two options -- make a statement or ask questions. By choosing to ask questions, you can learn valuable information about others and help them to open up.
4. Listen actively. The best way to understand and meet the needs of the people with whom you are talking is through deep, genuine attention to what others are saying. This means keeping an open mind even if you disagree with what the person is saying. It also means keeping the focus on the other person's words, not formulating in your head what your response will be to their comments.
5. Make a contribution. Volunteer for a committee, host a meeting, offer a presentation, provide leadership. Trust is built when others have an opportunity to experience your skills and strengths. By making a contribution you provide a low risk way for people to evaluate your skill, talent and value.
6. Relentlessly follow up. After meeting with a prospective referral source from a networking activity, make the follow-up calls, schedule the lunch meetings, email the article you discussed. If you are on a committee, do what you say you're going to do in the time frame to which you committed.
7. Be selective about your networking activities. Your time is limited, and you cannot be all things to all people. Select the networking activities that interest you the most and that give you access to people who have the characteristics of your top referral sources. For example, if you do not get a lot of referrals from the general business population, it may not be a good idea to attend the monthly Rotary club meeting. You would receive a greater return on your time if you participated in a local training or practice group meeting.

It's not enough to read articles and tips. Great networking requires action:

1. Get involved in your professional community. Participate on a committee, join a practice group, or offer to chair an important project.
2. Make a list of key networking opportunities and schedule them in your calendar. Make it a priority to attend.
3. Make a contribution to others- send more referrals, offer to provide information that will help others, mentor new collaborative professionals.

Networking is a fabulous tool to open up your sphere of influence and connect with more people. Your ability to truly focus on people is at the heart of building strong professional relationships. Go out and talk to others, take an active interest in them, listen, feel and sense what is going on around you. Get involved, participate on boards, make a contribution to targeted groups. By doing these things you will be creating the foundation for growing a successful law practice. Elizabeth Ferris, founder of Ferris Consulting, specializes in assisting attorneys, mental health professionals and financial specialists to grow their practice through result-oriented marketing and practice development strategies. She has worked with attorneys, collaborative professionals and mediators across North America and the UK to implement effective strategies for increasing awareness and demand for their services. Elizabeth can be reached at eferris@ferrisconsult.com or <http://www.ferrisconsult.com>

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