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LEGAL MARKETING

Twenty Things You Can Do for Clients for Free

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Special to the Legal

Now more than ever, great rainmakers know that their mantra is "Give to get." Instead of looking at every client as a dollar sign, smart business getters will turn most of the marketing energy into giving more than just billable services to each and every client. Savvy lawyers today will be looking for countless ways to add value to the client's life and world in ways that do not show up on the bills.

Businesses and individuals do not want to spend money on legal fees. It's that simple. But because sometimes they have to, we want them to turn to the lawyers who not only have the skill but who have shown a genuine interest in their businesses and lives.

So the concept of "giving to get" involves searching for ways to enhance the client's world — and doing this on a regular basis. Here are 20 ideas for "giving to get." Oh, and by the way, these will involve nonbillable time on your part. But if you do them right, the time you spend giving will be incidental to the rewards you will see of great work down the road.

• No. 1: Visit your clients on your nickel. Get in a car, plane or train and meet with your clients at their offices. Take a tour of their facilities. Meet their key people. Take them to lunch at a white-tablecloth business restaurant and really listen to how things are going. If you do nothing else on this list, do this. It will make the most impact with your client. Try to do this no less than three times a year — if not more.

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• No. 2: Do a free program for your client. Do this on-site on some topic that will make them more money or keep them in compliance or avoid legal expense. If your client needs continuing education credits, try to become a provider.

• No. 3: Offer to do a free annual audit of the client's compliance with a regulatory area that falls within your practice. Environmental, workplace, immigration, securities and more areas of law are rife with compliance and reporting requirements. Do the audit for free and then offer to do the work that will follow.

• No. 4: Offer to come in and audit the litigation files of the client to see where costs can be reduced or better efficiencies put into place.

• No. 5: Send the client work, a contact, or use the client's services yourself. Make introductions that will help the client in his or her professional or business life.

• No. 6: Get to know the client's business inside and out — on your time. Offer to sit in on meetings, learn the manufacturing process and more — so you can provide the best counsel. Can you imagine a company hosting their lawyer for several days on-site and teaching him or her everything about their business? Why would the company ever go to another law firm after that? Make this part of your firm's culture. Thompson & Hine, a firm recently highlighted for its terrific service to clients by the BTI Consulting Group, has as its stated pledge on its website — under the heading "What Clients Can Expect from Us" — the following: "We make it our business to understand your business. We will invest our time and resources to develop and maintain knowledge of the dynamics that impact both your industry and your organization. Understanding your business will help us provide better counsel to you."

• No. 7: If a disaster hits or the markets go south again in a big way, look for ways to assess how this event affects your clients. Fulbright & Jaworski did just this with respect to the BP

Deepwater Horizon situation last spring. According to marketing expert Tom Kane, the firm "assembled teams in Houston, New York and London to analyze what kinds of long-term issues their clients would face because of the accident including legislative, regulatory and litigation issues at their own expense."

• No. 8: Go to the client's industry association meeting with them and learn about the key problems facing them.

• No. 9: Support a client charity visibly and vocally. Roll up your sleeves and help. Be visible and active — and extremely helpful (offer to lead a committee, host meetings, raise funds, etc.)

• No. 10: Offer to have your billing and technology staff sit down with the client's to see how the firm can meet the company's stated preferences.

• No. 11: Invite your client in to meet with the firm's attorneys and staff to educate them on the kind of business they operate, their goals, obstacles and challenges and the kinds of service they are looking for from their outside counsel.

• No. 12: If the client uses several law firms, host a pow-wow with the client at your offices with representatives from each firm to identify ways everyone can jointly save the client money.

• No. 13: Appoint someone in the firm "client service officer" and have that person meet with the client yearly to assess ways that service can be improved.

• No. 14: Instead of issuing long newsletters and e-alerts, create personalized mailings to clients that are no longer than three sentences. First sentence: This is the development. Second sentence: This is how it could specifically affect you. Third sentence: What action to consider taking right now. This kind of personalized delivery of news can really help a company immediately and bring in an inquiry to you (more on this kind of personal communications in a later article).

• No. 15: As simple or silly as this seems, make sure every client has your phone numbers for business and after hours and those of your staff who are involved with the representation. Do this in a formal way — rather than assume the client has this information.

• No. 16: Offer to co-author an article for a client. You can do most of the work and have a positive spotlight shine on your client and their accomplishments.

• No. 17: State you will answer quick e-mails and phone calls for free. Show these write-offs on your bill. Do not assume the client will remember you did this.

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• No. 18: Look for ways to further support the client. Nominate them for an award — there are many out there! Meet their families and look for ways to help their kids in their endeavors.

• No. 19: Help the client solve a non-legal matter. I recently heard an anecdote about a law firm that sent its staff over to help a client with file storage issues. This was a win-win for everyone.

• No. 20: Be a "strategizer" for your clients. Appoint someone on your team to study trends affecting the client's industry or business. Research their competition's goals by reviewing their websites and Google information. Hold "off the clock" strategy sessions. Present them with this information along with recommendations for success.

Would you believe me if I said I have at least 20 more tips? When you put yourself in the client's shoes there is so much you can do to help them in one way or another. The bottom line is: Focus on ways to contribute to your clients' success, and you will succeed, too. Your business development mantra is now: "Give to get! ... Give to get!"

So, get up, get started, get going! •