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Implementing a 90-Day Plan to Grow Your Practice

BY STACY WEST CLARK

Special to the Legal

One of the hottest areas of law firm marketing today is one-on-one coaching. I have been providing this service to clients for years. But I am here to tell you that many lawyers do not need a coach to do some successful marketing. Business development has a very simple formula and once you know it, you can repeat it over and over again to grow your practice.

So, what's the secret formula? Before I tell you, bear this mind. For this to work:

1. You have to really, really, really (yes — that is three “reallys”) want to grow your business and be committed to doing what I will map out for the long haul — not just in week two, but week 52.

2. You have to be personable. If you are arrogant, self-absorbed or uninterested in other people's lives, by and large, whatever you do won't work.

3. You need to be willing to try a lot of things — only some of which may pay dividends.

4. You need to embrace the principle of “give to get.” This means spending a fair amount of time (a minimum of four hours a week) considering the client,



STACY WEST

CLARK has been helping Pennsylvania lawyers and law firms expand their practices for more than 25 years. She is a former attorney with Morgan, Lewis & Bockius

and was its first marketing director. She is president of Stacy Clark Marketing (www.stacyclarkmarketing.com).

referral source or new target's professional and personal world and somehow taking steps to make it better — and doing that for free and without being asked to.

So if you are raring to go and really understand that the key to getting business from anyone going forward will be to diligently demonstrate how you get their business, understand their problems and think about their needs constantly off the clock, you are ready for the secret formula — your personal business development plan for the next 90 days.

- Look at a list of your current clients and referral sources. These are the low-hanging fruit because presumably they love you already and do not want the hassle of

changing lawyers. Come up with three clients and three referral sources you will target for a great deal of TLC in the next 90 days. For each, do something that is meaningful to their business or them personally. Your actions could include social activities that they want to do (if they hate the opera, don't take them), the alleviation of some kind of problem at work (you know they are moving and you contact a great inexpensive mover and get them a great deal) or the prevention of legal woes down the road (tour their facility for free, review their contracts or employee policy manual). I call these value-added services (see “Twenty Things You Can Do for Clients for Free,” January 18, 2011, *The Legal*).

You can do as many as you want in the 90-day period, but you *must* do at least one, and here is the kicker: After you have done it, you must have a follow-up action ready to go. Doing one thing is not enough. You have to touch the three names you have listed for each category five to seven times in a year in a way that is meaningful to them. So every contact with them requires a follow-up action. If you are not sure what to do, learn more about their needs and goals. Conduct regular research

on the client/referral source. Set up Google alerts, Twitter searches and more, and be sure to review the press release section of his or her website. Also, stay on top of new legislation, trends or important issues affecting his or her business. All of this intelligence will allow you to strategically calculate your next step.

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- At the same time you are focusing on three clients and three referral sources, pick three nonclients you want to get in front of and repeat all the steps I mentioned above.

- So now you have nine people to focus on — to “give to get” — for the next three months. Here are two more things you need to do in this same period.

First, you need to pick an organization, task force, association or group of some kind where people you want to represent congregate and get deeply involved. Look at trade, economic, legislative, industry, cultural, charitable and civic groups and more, and find one where you really want to get to know the members and help advance the mission of the group. In the next 90 days, pick the group and go to one meeting. Identify two people at that meeting you want to

get to know better and have lunch with them. Thereafter, (1) continue to go to meetings, (2) deepen your relationship with the two members you met at the first meeting or get to know two new members, and (3) look for opportunities to show your stuff to help the group. The goal after a year is to hold a leadership position, write for the group's publication, speak at its meetings, host events, get to know members well and more.

Second, during the same 90 days, you need to identify a hot topic that could cause people to lose or make money or be in some kind of personal or professional trouble. I call this finding a scary issue. Write on this topic for a publication read by your target audience. Send a letter to clients about it. Speak on the topic at clients' places of business. Then, add these activities to your firm and LinkedIn bios. Meet with a reporter who might wish to hear your views on the scary issue for an article for his or her readership in which you can be quoted.

So that's it. A 90-day marketing plan. What happens on day 91? The nine targets become 18. In other words, you repeat the whole thing over again for a new set of clients, referral sources and prospects, and you do a meaningful follow-up action for each of the first nine you focused on the previous three months.

So am I saying you should never hire a coach? No. I have worked with many lawyers who really want someone to regularly push them and make sure they are meeting their deadlines and following up appropriately. For these lawyers

— who once nudged by a consultant or in-house marketing executive will actually get things done — outside help makes sense and the cost is insignificant to the amount of revenue the lawyer will bring in.

In addition, other lawyers really do better and thrive when they can have a dialogue with someone else and brainstorm on appropriate steps.

So give it a try. You now have the blueprint to prepare and implement your own 90-day marketing plan. You will see that this stuff really works. I am rooting for you. Get up, get started and get going. •