

Client Development-In a Nutshell

by Cordell Parvin

As we approach 2009 in a difficult economic time, the ability to secure, retain and expand relationships with clients has never been more important for young lawyers. Clients are a lawyer's most important asset. Yet, many young lawyers do not know where to start.

Having practiced law for many years and faced many economic slumps, I have some thoughts I call client development in a nutshell. I invite your questions on any of these and I would be happy to expand my thoughts for you.

1. Client development has changed. It is more focused than ever on the client, becoming a remarkable lawyer in the client's eyes and in building a relationship based on trust. You may hear senior lawyers say: "Just do great work and the clients will come." Some may say: "It's not what you know, but who you know." Those approaches worked well when the football team in Houston was called the Oilers, but they are not enough now. Today, there are plenty of fine lawyers doing very good work. Clients are no longer local and no longer loyal and they have more choices and less time to choose. The net of all these changes is: "It is not what you know, or who you know. It is who knows what you know." You have to become visible to the potential clients who can hire you.

2. Your clients expect you to understand their industry, their company and them individually. Surveys show that corporate clients want lawyers who can put the business context to their legal work. Individual cli-

ents want lawyers who understand their personal situation.

3. By reading what clients read and belonging to organizations they belong to, you are best positioned to identify their problems, opportunities, internal and external changes that require legal help. Read business publications searching for the future legal issues. Set up Google alerts on specific topics.

4. Prepare a business plan with goals to focus your attention and not waste time. When preparing the plan, do not focus so much on a flurry of client development activities. Instead, focus on changing your lifestyle habits. I like to say that how well you plan and execute your non-billable time will determine the quality of your career and how well you plan and execute your personal time will determine the quality of your life.

5. As mentioned above, to become a "go to lawyer" in the eyes of your clients and potential clients you have to become visible. One of the best ways to become visible to your target market is by writing and speaking on their problems, opportunities, internal changes and external changes. Long ago I decide that writing articles and speaking gave me the greatest return on my investment of non-billable time. Today many lawyers are becoming visible by writing Blogs and doing Podcasts.

6. Connectors are best suited to become visible and get business by being active in the Bar and/or community and building as many relationships with diverse groups of people as possible. Are you a connector?

To see, take the test in Malcolm Gladwell's book "The Tipping Point." If you do not have the book, you can find it at his website: http://www.gladwell.com/tippingpoint/tp_excerpt2.html Many connector lawyers are using the internet social media like LinkedIn to connect with potential clients and referral sources.

7. Client development is a contact sport. Be purposeful about staying in touch with your contacts. When you make contact do so in a way they will find value rather than perceive you as trying to sell your services.

8. Clients hire lawyers more than law firms. You get considered based on your profile as a "go to" lawyer and you get hired based on how well you build trust and connect with the decision maker.

9. Clients are not satisfied with the level of service they receive. It is important to be responsive and to understand their industry company and representative. Think of ways you can enable the client representative to do his or her job more effectively.

10. Make client development a habit and try to do something, no matter how small, each and every day. Sit down with your colleagues and make a list of potential things you can do each and every day.

If you want to get weekly information on client development and career development, I encourage you to subscribe to my Blog. www.lawconsultingblog.com.

Cordell Parvin is a Dallas-based career coach and consultant to law firms. Prior to coaching, Cordell practiced law for 37 years and was a Partner and Practice Group leader with Jenkins and Gilchrist.

DAYL to Host Mock Interviews at SMU School of Law

Each fall and spring, the DAYL Law Student Assistance Committee helps SMU students prepare for interviews with law firms. DAYL is proud to host this program for SMU, but we need volunteers! The spring interviews will take place at SMU on **Tuesday, Feb-**

ruary 10 and Wednesday, February 11. The interviews will be held from 6:00 - 8:30 p.m. Each interview lasts approximately 30 minutes.

As a volunteer, you will be provided with each student's resume, you will have 15-20 minutes to conduct an interview, and then you can take the remaining time

to provide constructive feedback on the student's interview skills. The SMU students greatly appreciate our advice as most of these students are preparing for their first legal job interview. If you are able to help, or if you have any questions, contact **Sarah Kownacki** (skownacki@thompsoncoe.com).