



**"The young lawyers with whom you graduated or those that you start out with in practice will someday be your greatest sources of business."**

# Young Lawyers

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## BUILDING BUSINESS BY GENERATING CLIENTS

Law school teaches us a lot of things, but not much about the *business* of practicing law. Yet if you choose a career in private practice, there will be but one certainty: whether you decide to join a firm or go the solo route, you will need clients. Young lawyers must learn the art of business development. The young lawyers I know who have gone on to become young partners or successful solo practitioners all have one thing in common – they know how to find and keep clients. Learning to successfully generate business has probably never been more critical to a lawyer's success than in recent economic times. For a select, fortunate few, the ability to generate business appears to come naturally. For most of us though, it is an acquired skill. The question is, exactly how does one acquire the skills necessary for generating business? You could ask ten different lawyers and you'd probably get ten different answers. I did some asking around myself and the following is a compilation of savvy business strategies that are especially applicable in the legal world.

- Tell people what you do. This one sounds almost too easy, but it is critical. No one is going to ask you for legal advice if they don't know that you are a lawyer. Keep a stack of business cards handy at all times, and don't be afraid to use them. Even if they are tossed aside later that day, just having seen your name on

paper increases the odds that a person will remember it when they need legal advice.

- Tell people what the other lawyers in your firm do. Most businesses engage in a cross-selling strategy that seems a bit underutilized in the legal community. Think of the last time you entered a bank or bought car insurance; someone likely asked if you had any other financial or insurance needs. If there are other lawyers at your firm practicing in different areas, make sure new and existing clients know about all of the services those at your firm can provide.



it is rare for another lawyer to actually become your client, the odds are good that lawyers you know will, at some point, need to refer a case to another lawyer (think conflict of interest, existing client that needs advice outside the referring lawyer's expertise, or local counsel roles). American Bar Association events are a prime place to meet practitioners from other states, who, eventually, may need to refer a case to a Nevada attorney or even just find local counsel.

- Reciprocate. When another lawyer or business professional sends business your way, always say thank you and let them know you will endeavor to return the favor. When the opportunity presents itself, reciprocate and make sure the person you are referring knows to pass along your name as the source of the referral. Consider approaching someone you trust who works in a different field or practice area and suggesting an informal agreement to mutually refer clients where possible.
- Follow through. If someone sends you contact information for a referral, or when the potential new client actually calls, make it a priority to follow up both with the prospective client and the referring attorney. Your prompt follow through will demonstrate to the potential new client and the referring attorney that you are someone who can be trusted and will likely set the tone for your future relationship with both of them.
- Be civil with opposing counsel. Few attorneys know the quality of your attitude or legal skills as well as your opposing counsel. You may be the most skilled attorney in the world, but no one is referring a case to you if you are difficult to deal with (unless the potential new client is also of the difficult variety). So in addition to producing quality work product, be civil. Afford professional courtesies where you can do so without sacrificing the interests of your clients and remember not to take this stuff so personally. We all have a job to do – even your opposing counsel.
- Do not underestimate your friends. The young lawyers with whom you graduated or those that you start out with in practice will someday be your greatest sources of business. Sure, right now you're all in the same boat: a little overwhelmed with learning how to practice law in the first place with not much time left to worry about the business of it all. There will come a day, though, when your newbie lawyer buddies are not so new anymore, and those that have mastered the art of business development may have more work than they can or want to handle. They'll be sharing the wealth with those they trust and the attorneys they know will reciprocate – start proving now that you are that person. ■