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THE ABCs OF MARKETING AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Most lawyers make marketing and business development more complicated than needed. Developing new business – and keeping clients delighted – isn't rocket science. In fact, it's as simple as ABC.

Ask good questions. When you first meet a potential client, begin by asking open-ended questions such as: "Tell me about yourself and your business (or practice)" "What do you want to accomplish with this project (or matter or case)?" "What are your expectations?"

Be a problem *solver*, not a problem maker.

Communicate. Tell prospective clients how you would approach their matter – and what it will cost. Keep existing clients informed. "Shower them with paper or e mail" is still a good rule.

Delegate. Assign as much of the work as you can to qualified junior lawyers, paralegals, support staff or outside sources to reduce the cost of your services. Explain to the client why you are doing this and that you will be reviewing everything and will be responsible, no matter who does the work.

Educate clients and prospects on how you can help them. People don't want to be sold legal services. They want information and answers.

Focus your practice in certain areas or industries or on certain types of clients. Don't try to be all things to all people.

Get out of the office. Visit clients, referral sources and prospective clients. If they're based too far away to visit, don't send an e mail. Call them.

Help your clients in their businesses or with their problems. Introduce them to other people who can be of service to them – sources of capital, accountants, potential customers.

Identify other services clients need.

Jury isn't only a group of people encountered in the courtroom. Your clients are the toughest jury you will ever face. Make sure their verdict is in your favor.

Know your clients' business. You can't help them unless you do.

Listen to your clients and prospects. And hear what they tell you.

Market as if your practice and life depended on it. They just might.

Never fail to promptly return clients' phone calls or respond to their e mails, no matter how trivial they may seem to you. Clients will remember.

Omit the term "billing partner" from your vocabulary. Clients hate that term. Instead, use the term "responsible partner" or "responsible attorney" because that's what you really are.

Ppractice marketing and business development every day.

Quality work and service are defined by the client, not you. Be sure your clients feel you are delivering both.

Rrequest feedback. Ask your clients what you can do to improve your service. Then do it.

Ssweat the details. It's often the little things, even typos in a letter or memo, that shake clients' trust and cause them to question your ability.

Ttreat every client as if he or she were your only client.

Under-promise. Then over-deliver. Don't just meet deadlines. Beat them.

Value is when the client feels the work you did or the result you obtained was worth the fee they paid – or more. Deliver it.

Word-of-mouth is still the best form of marketing. Do everything you possibly can to ensure that your clients are spreading the good word about you and your work.

X-ray your procedures, office operations and client service regularly to make certain you are as efficient and attentive as you should be – and as your clients expect.

Yes is a very important word. Don't be afraid to use it but also have the courage to say "no". The magic words to a client are "Yes, if . . ." or "No, but . . ."

Zeal makes all the difference between you and your competition. Maintain it for your practice and for your clients. Your energy and enthusiasm will distinguish you from other lawyers.

So the next time you can't think of what you should do to grow your practice, remember your ABCs. Successful marketing and business development are just that simple.

Robert Denney Associates Inc. has provided strategic management and marketing counsel to law firms, companies and non-profit organizations throughout the United States and parts of Canada for 40 years. Recent Communiques, as well as information about our services, are posted on our web site www.robertdenney.com

P.O. Box 551, Wayne, PA 19087-0551 • 610-644-7020 • fax: 610-296-8726
email: bob@robertdenney.com • web site: www.robertdenney.com