

Ten Business Development Tips for Millennials

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Business development can be a daunting notion for trained lawyers. Law school teaches you how to be a lawyer, not a business generator. In this increasingly competitive legal market, business generation is one of the most important aspects of a successful legal career.

The first step of client development is identifying your targets. No matter what area of law you practice in, your targets should be the decision-makers at the businesses you represent and businesses like them. Today, many of these decision-makers are baby boomers, born roughly between 1945 and 1964, and people in Generation X, born roughly between 1965 and 1979.

In order to figure out how to market to people in those generations, we need to understand what they think about us. If you were born after 1980, then you are a millennial. According to Terri Klass and Judy Lindenberger, authors of the article "Characteristics of Millennials in the Workplace," older generations may think that millennials are entitled, high-maintenance, know-it-alls, not willing to put in the work, fickle, soft and ready to jump ship at the first sign of trouble. Others think that we are the "can do" generation, never worrying about failure, that we display an abundance of self-confidence, are extremely focused on developing ourselves and are always setting new challenges to achieve.

So how does a millennial develop clients? Here are the 10 most practical client development tips for our generation.

Formulate a Mission Statement

Client development is very subjective and very personal. Before you begin, you should spend some time figuring out why exactly you want to develop your business. Some people want to have an independent practice. Others may want to work in a different area of the law or a different geographic area. You may want to increase influence within your firm or the legal community. For most, client development equates to increased economic potential. When you identify your motivation, write it down. Client development is a long process that will not happen overnight. If you have a solid mission statement, you can always look to it and refocus on what you want to achieve.

Create a Business Development Plan

There are many resources available to assist you in creating a plan. Ask your marketing department for a template. Search the Internet. Go to the library or bookstore. Once you find a template, make the plan your own.

Create both long- and short-term goals that will advance your mission statement. Long-term goals are crucial and may take years to achieve. Short-term goals are things that you can accomplish in a year or less: speaking at seminars, writing for publications or running for office in a bar association. Identify tasks that will help you achieve your long- and short-term goals, such as spending 15 minutes every day monitoring legal news, identifying new connections on LinkedIn every 30 days and attending bar association events quarterly.

When you break goals down into easily achievable steps, you create a pathway to success.

To evaluate your business development plan, incorporate a diary system. At a given interval, complete a self-evaluation of your plan. If something isn't working, try something new. Remember, millennials are known as the "can do" generation. You can figure it out.

Focus on the Triangle of Success for Lawyers

Deborah McMurray, a marketing consultant at Content Pilot, created the triangle of success for lawyers. According to McMurray, successful lawyers excel at three things: (1) service delivery; (2) reputation management; and (3) relationship development. McMurray understands that older attorneys, who have been practicing for years, may be skilled at one or two things, but are lacking at the third.

Millennials are highly adaptable, willing to learn and are not scared of a challenge. We are at a point in our careers where it is easy to improve on one of the areas that might be lacking. If you work now to get out of your comfort zone and focus on an area that you neglect, such as reputation management, then it will be that much easier for you to continue do it in the future.

Do Good Work

Never underestimate the value of doing excellent work for your current clients. The foundation of any business development plan is good work. It is easy to lose sight of that as a young attorney. Recognize that you are part of a team. As the team works toward a goal, your clients are evaluating you. Doing good work today creates future opportunities.

Enhance Your Reputation and Visibility

There are several ways to increase your public profile. Identify things that you like to do. If you like to write, write an article. If you are a great

public speaker, participate in a panel discussion. Millennials are tech savvy, so why not create a blog or tweet industry news? Identify professional organizations in your field and get involved. Also consider getting involved in charitable, civic or community organizations. Host an industry meeting or CLE at your law firm. No matter what it is you choose to do, make sure that you do what you like. We are more likely to do something well if it is something we like to do.

Develop Personal Relationships

Develop a personal friendship or rapport with similarly aged clients you work with. Think about how to make the relationship better or how to make it grow. Focus on being a good friend, not on how the other person might benefit you in the future.

Developing a relationship with an older client may be more difficult. One way to bridge the generation gap is to find common areas of interest. Millennials are known to be cultural aggregators. We binge on television, movies, music, restaurants and trends. Pay attention to what your clients talk about. You are bound to find an area of common ground. That common interest may serve as the foundation for building a relationship.

Go to Events and Work the Room

Networking is not about you; it is about the person you are talking to. Ask open-ended questions and actively listen to the answers. People like talking about themselves. All you have to do is listen.

Not everyone is born with the knack for working a room. However, it is a skill that all client developers should learn. Young attorneys should consider going to events with a colleague. A networking partner can serve the same purpose as a workout partner. They push you to try harder and to get out of your comfort zone. Before the event, you and your partner can talk about goals and come up with an action plan.

You can talk about areas of weakness and help each other overcome those challenges.

Nail Your Elevator Speech

An elevator speech is a brief statement that conveys confidence and clarity, and communicates who you are, what you do and how you can be a resource. You should be able to deliver this pitch in the span of an elevator ride. For example, one version of my elevator pitch might be, "I protect and defend businesses when claims are made against them or their products." If given the opportunity to elaborate, have one interesting and engaging story to tell based on a personal experience. Be careful not to exaggerate your contribution. Demonstrate some self-awareness by remaining humble and acknowledging that it was a team success, and explaining your contributions to the team. After that one story, don't continue to talk about yourself. Remember the basic principle of client development is that the process is about the client, not you.

Use Social Media But Understand the Dangers

As a millennial, you probably have several social media accounts. Think about how your public accounts will be perceived by clients and potential clients. Create a free LinkedIn account; it is referred to as "the adult Facebook." LinkedIn allows you to quickly and easily connect with

contacts from social networks such as school, work, social and professional organizations, Greek societies and more. Post timely updates on your LinkedIn profile page about current professional activities to enhance your visibility among your connections. As with any social networking account, be careful not to post any content you would not want a client—or your boss—to read.

Protracted and Patient Effort Is Needed

Client development is a journey, not a destination. It takes years to develop a reputation for delivering service and to build relationships. You will experience successes and setbacks along the way, but stay determined and be patient. Anyone can write a business development plan, but the key is putting the plan into action. As an attorney, you are the chief executive officer of your business. It is up to you to get started and to make sure that it is successful. Embrace the positive characteristics of our millennial generation and move forward with confidence.

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