

## Business Development

# Rising Above Marketing & Business Development Hurdles



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I have spent my career thus far practicing law in a “big firm.” First at Testa, Hurwitz and Thieabult LLP and now at Duane Morris LLP. My experiences at both firms have been wonderful. I have had the opportunity to work with some extremely bright and talented attorneys who assisted me in developing my legal skills. My focus, for the first nine years of my career, was to make myself the best lawyer I could be. I advanced up the ladder—as is the goal of every eager, young associate—and made partner.

I arrived.

Or so I mistakenly thought.

All of those years I spent focused on practicing law, I failed to focus on the other aspect of a successful career in the law—marketing and business development. At least during the first several years of my career, the idea of marketing and business development was not something I thought to focus on, nor was it something that was emphasized.

But as I moved closer to the years of partnership consideration, I began to hear over and over that I had to spend more time marketing and developing business. This was a foreign concept to me, but one that when I stepped back and thought about it, made perfect sense. In order to continue to practice law, I would need clients for whom I could work. We are after all, a service industry.

Having woken up to the idea that I needed to put as much focus on developing clients as I had (and still do) in developing my legal skills, I thought about how to approach it. My conclusion was to approach it much like I approach the process of learning in general; read as many articles as I can find and attend as many seminars as I can focusing on the topic. Cramming worked so

many times before, why not with this new learning endeavor.

And so it began.

How to work a room; tips on developing a referral network; suggestions on things you can do each day to reach out to current and potential clients; questions you should ask current and prospective clients were just a few of the many articles I found myself reading late into the night. I also attended seminars where those who know teach those of us that do not; including some very valuable ones offered by the WBA. I was going to gather as much information as I could. I would pass this test like every other test. I would be able to market and develop business.

While reading the articles and attending the seminars certainly helped, I also learned that success in marketing and business development is more a function of doing rather than studying. And therein lies the problem: the doing. For some, the art, and it is an art, of marketing and business development is easy—it’s within their comfort zone. For others, like me, it is not. Or at least I thought it was not until I realized that while you can develop your marketing and business skills by watching others, just like you develop your legal skills by watching others, ultimately, you must determine what works and does not work for you in terms of your style.

Once I realized that there was no “cookie cutter” style to marketing, no “one size fits all” formula, I learned that like most things in life, I needed to look at the endless styles and techniques and choose those that felt comfortable to me and put them into action.

Another hurdle to “doing,” was finding the time. Having a heavy work load and a busy life, where was I going to find the time to market? Then it dawned on me, I had to stop thinking about the parts of my life in separate circles, and had to think of them in a more inclusive way. Marketing and business development can happen anywhere. Indeed, this concept was played out at

a recent meeting I attended. The participants were divided into teams and then sent out to various restaurants/bars throughout the city with the instruction that, as a team, we were to develop a potential client. While not every group succeeded, we all learned that the potential to meet a client can happen anywhere. You never know who you might meet sitting in a bar or on a plane or at your child's soccer game or any where else you find yourself.

This is not to say that I have turned every event in my life into a potential marketing activity – that is not the style that works for me—but I have opened myself up to the idea that the potential exists in every situation. Now, when I find a conversation going in that direction or it seems appropriate to do so, I take the chance and market. One message I have heard continually, and a message that rings true, is that you have to ask for the work. While it may just end up on your desk some of the time, it will not happen all of the time. And while asking is difficult and you will hear “no” many times, you will also hear “yes.”

Another lesson learned, in fact just this morning on my drive to work with my friend, is that I am not just marketing my own skills. The reality is, I should always be marketing my firm's skills, which include a much broader and more experienced range of services than I alone bring to the table.

My friend, who has spent her career at a smaller firm, has focused on marketing and business development for a lot longer. She started after only practicing for a few years. She felt intimidated at the idea of marketing herself; therefore, she focused on marketing the firm as a team. It is also a way to draw the attention off yourself, making the whole process more comfortable—at least it does for me. This is an important lesson. By altering your thinking to what can my firm can do for

this person, you increase the likelihood that you will be able to truly address the needs of the potential client.

This thinking works regardless of whether you are at a firm that provides a broad range of services or a boutique firm. If you need to refer the person to a friend outside your firm, you are developing a referral network that may in the future bring work right back to you.

Another step I found helpful in adapting my personal style and technique was to get more involved within the legal field. I now volunteer to speak on panels, volunteer to author articles, have joined organizations focused on networking, and became more active in the WBA. And while I will continue in these endeavors, I will, as time passes, keep my eyes open to new opportunities.

I have come to accept that there is no marketing/business development test. This is not a situation where I can study for days or months, take a test, pass and be proficient. One can learn a lot about marketing and business development through reading and seminars, and it might even be something law schools should add to their curriculum, however, to really be successful you must get out there and do it, and continue to do it over and over again. Once I stopped approaching it as something I have to do and move it into a category of something I want to do it became much less task like. I now see marketing and business development as a continuing opportunity to meet new people who do interesting things and who have life experiences far different than mine.

Whether or not my interaction with them brings work to me or my firm, it brings with it what all interactions in life bring—an opportunity for personal growth.

Ms. Rich is a partner with the law firm of Duane Morris LLP, which is a full-service law firm of more than 650 attorneys who offer innovative solutions across diverse industries in the United States and internationally to address the legal and business challenges of today's evolving global markets. Ms. Rich is a commercial trial attorney who handles complex litigations including, contract and business disputes, unfair and deceptive trade practices cases, and patent infringement cases for a diverse client base. In addition, Ms. Rich represents a number of healthcare providers in disputes with payors regarding reimbursement for services rendered.