

# Are You a Lawyer Who Sells... Well?!

by Lynda C. McDermott, MSOD, CSP

Whatever stage you are in your career, it is appropriate to periodically step back and ask yourself the question, "Where am I going in my law career?" and, more specifically,

"Do I want to *grow* my practice to the next level?"

"Do I want to get promoted?"

"Do I want to become the "go to" person in my field?"

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, it is imperative that you become increasingly proficient at the competency we call *business and client development*. In a recent survey of lawyers, 91 percent said that law schools prepared them not well, very poorly or not at all to market their law practice after graduation. So, what's an ambitious lawyer to do?

First of all, you must become comfortable with the idea of "selling" yourself and your services. One of the key findings in our research is that successful lawyers are not afraid of the idea of selling, i.e., looking for opportunities with prospective clients to exchange value – to provide their expertise to solve a client's problems in exchange for billable hours/revenue.

Unfortunately, many lawyers subscribe to a belief that I call the "Field of Dreams" myth. Remember that movie with Kevin Costner? He played an Iowa farmer who believed that if he built the baseball stadium of his dreams in his cornfield, people would show up to watch baseball. "Build it and they will come" was the main theme of that movie. For a lot of lawyers, this myth translates into a belief that sounds like this: "Do good work and they (in this case – clients) will come." This belief affects what choices they make about what they do and how they spend their time:

"I've got to get this done so I'll just cancel that lunch I've scheduled" or

"I've got to finish this work – I'll be here late enough as it is – I'm not going to that bar association meeting tonight" or

"I know I should probably try to speak at that conference – but I don't have time to go and I really don't want to fly out there for that long."

One of the things we have learned in our research on lawyers who are successful in business development is that these lawyers have what I call a "Calling Card."

What should be on your *calling card*? I want you to break out that question into two parts as you think about your work. First, what do you *love* doing in the field of law? And then, the second question is: What aspects of your work are you *great* at performing? Both questions will lead you to your *calling card*. Successful lawyers use their *calling card* to describe what they do with great enthusiasm.

The next thing that really successful lawyers have is a group of people who we call *loyalists*. These are clients and colleagues who know them and love them. Not only do loyalists want to work with you because they respect your expertise and perspectives, they also talk about you and your services proudly – "I've used Shelly over at ABC law firm for that type of work" and they refer others to you frequently. Successful lawyers cultivate a garden of these loyalists, who think of them as their "trusted advisors."

Do you know who *your* loyalists are? Are you just working with clients or are you consciously cultivating them as your loyalists? Are you spending the quality

time you need with your clients to build a Trusted Advisor relationship? These loyalists are your first source of continued and new business.

And finally, successful lawyers build their visibility and credibility with their target markets by serving on charitable/professional committees, speaking at conferences, writing articles, etc. They use whatever marketing/networking strategies that are suited to their personal and professional strengths and interests.

A former client of mine who sought me out as a business development coach to help grow her law practice recently wrote me: "I'm now having client prospect meetings and I'm actually getting work

from them...I'm much more confident now and that makes a big difference!" What made the *biggest* difference is that she came to realize that the phone would not just ring; she was going to have to "sell" herself. So she started going to conferences, asking for speaking opportunities and networking over lunches and dinners.

If you are a lawyer who bristles at the word "sell" but who wants to see progress in your career, substitute the word with alternatives, such as *business development* or *client development*. No matter what you call it, you are going to have to push yourself out of your chair and get out on the street.....with enthusiasm!

Ms. McDermott is President of EquiPro International, Ltd., a New York City-based international management consulting firm specializing in the strategic development of organizations and their employees. Her 30 years' experience includes line management and internal and external consulting. Over the last 20 years, her firm has provided consulting services in such areas as: strategic planning, leadership, team development and executive coaching, performance management and business development in a wide variety of industries. She recently conducted a program, *Networking for Professional Development and Legal Growth*, at NYCLA's CLE Institute.