

## How Sharp Are Your Sales Skills?

By Kimberly Alford Rice

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As the legal services arena continues to experience turbulence from a host of challenges such as what to do about your summer associate program to non-performing equity partners, we consistently advise law firm clients on an area of non-ending concern: cultivating effective rainmakers of lawyers who have no sales background.

Some law firm leaders still balk at the term "sales" as it relates to "developing business" while progressive firms have begun to accept the "new normal" of attracting, getting and keeping clients by following a proven methodology of being retained by clients: understanding thoroughly a prospect's "pain points" in his/her business and/or life and offering a way to solve it.

One of the challenges that many lawyers face is that they are often ill at ease engaging in conversation where no present threat or problem exists. We've witnessed this as they struggle through small talk or fail to gather pertinent information which may lead to discovering the clients' strategic and/or competitive challenges.

Often in a nervous moment, they resort back to topics they know very well: themselves, their area of practice and their firm's capabilities. To serious prospects, the "it's all about me" presentation is highly *underwhelming* and may lead to an early end of the meeting.

We point out these case experiences to generously underscore: successfully selling legal services can be very challenging, especially when most lawyers have no professional background, training or course work to learn that it is a process, not a "one size fits all" sales pitch to every prospect that invites you to his office.

First, we've observed, many lawyers need to rid themselves of the negative untenable self-perception that they are "above" the selling process and/or that it is "not" in their job description. Uh, what if you want to have control over your career and generate more profit from your practice? How's that working for you?

If your practice is not developing as you would like for it to, may we suggest that you actively seek to learn the consultative selling approach. You may look to your local bar for "preferred vendors" who offer sales skills training. Most state bar associations have special educational programming and publications which address these topics. Or, you can even retain a professional coach or trainer who can provide invaluable insights and

proven methodologies to the sales process.

However you choose to improve your sales sensibilities, the next time you are in a "sales situation", catch yourself when you feel the temptation rising to roll off your credentials (that anyone can read on your website) and instead focus on asking open-ended questions to understand your prospect's "pain points".

Continued success in 2015.