Early 2013 Is Great Time to Set Practice Goals: Learning to Close More Sales

By Kimberly Alford Rice

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In the first two installments of this article, we discussed valuable prospect presentation and closing techniques to win more business. The last installment of this article will highlight critical closing tips when you have been "invited to the party" and how to use rejection to grow your practice.

Prepared to Win

There are critical steps that every lawyer must integrate into her business development initiatives in order to advance to the next step in the sales process.

First, remember that closing starts the first time that you meet someone – wherever that may be….in the courtroom, at a conference, or even on the Little League field. Many individuals do not consider the larger picture of the possibility that a potential client may be standing right beside you and you do not even realize it. If not a client, then a referral source. Treat every encounter as an opportunity to learn about someone's business and how you may be potentially helpful. Again, a mindset shift.

Listen to Win

It is never more critical to listen than when in selling situations. A misstep lawyers (and all business professionals, really) make is they misread a situation by talking too much…too much about all the important matters they have handled, the amazing results they have achieved, etc.

BIG TIP: The ***only*** thing a prospective client cares about is what you will *do for them*. Learn as much as you can about your prospects and their business. Identify their needs and prepare for your meetings accordingly. ***Practice*** (yes, this requires some "pre-sales meeting" mirror work) your best moves and go into the meeting with information that you know will win them over.

It is critically important to prompt the prospect to talk more than you. You can do that by using the research you have done on the prospect's business, its competitors, and other information by using it to frame your questions and presentations. Remember, asking open-ended questions (refer to installment two of this article series) is one of the best ways to prompt dialogue with an individual.

Take the Lead on Follow Up
A vital component to business generation is to create an effective follow-up plan. Good follow up enables you to fully capitalize on the opportunities that are already available to you from a myriad of business development encounters such as trade events, meetings and seminars.

Preparation:

- Organize the follow up before the meeting. Who in the group will take the lead, what kind of follow up will be taken, when and how? May seem obvious but how many times have you “intended” to follow up and then didn’t because “life just got in the way.”
- Calendar follow up with prospect. Often, a phone call is the preferred manner of initial follow up (though it is best to actually ask prospect their preferred method of communication). If you reach voicemail, leave a detailed message that you are eager to learn about any decisions the prospect may have made.
- During a call, be sure to mention a specific date/time you will follow up again and request that if this time does not work for the prospect, they have their assistant follow up with you for a better date/time. This reduces the back and forth of actually speaking with the prospect.

Make Rejection Work for You

If you do not win a proposal or are not awarded new client work, do not be discouraged. Below are some suggestions for pressing through initial rejection:

- If another firm has been selected, do not cross this potential work off your “new business target list”. Instead, reach out to your main contact in 3-4 months. Remind your contact that you still look forward to working with her sometime in the future. You may politely inquire if she is satisfied with the level of service and work product she is receiving from the new firm that was retained.

- Keep prospects to which you have submitted proposals on your “contact” list and make sure to follow through with them several times a year. Plot it out on your calendar immediately after learning the results of legal services selection.

The Sum Game

Winning work from existing clients is more challenging than ever. Landing new work from new clients requires a smarter approach with innovation and extra effort. And, client retention becomes even more critical to maintaining a pipeline.

Being a rainmaker is not for the faint hearted. Get serious in 2013 in building and growing a client base and immerse yourself with the proper tools to help you be success. These sales tips are just the beginning, but it’s a start.