

Keys to Success

Professional Development Tips for Young Lawyers



By David J. Oberly

Using Speaking Engagements to Develop New Clients and Business for Young Attorneys

Why It Matters

Billing large chunks of hours is necessary as an associate attorney, but being able to bill big hours is only half the battle when it comes to making partner at the vast majority of law firms. Young attorneys cannot assume that because they live at the office, billing an eye-popping number of hours, that they can automatically reach the partner ranks. Rather, in order to get that call, associates must also demonstrate that they can bring in a steady, consistent stream of business that will allow them to continue billing those hours on a long-term basis. Generally speaking, developing new business and clients encompasses a broad array of integrated marketing practices and activities. With that said, one of the most effective methods for developing new business as a young attorney is done through taking part in presentations, seminars, and other speaking engagements. Importantly, strategic speaking engagements represent one of the premier business generation and profile-building activities that a young lawyer can undertake, allowing young attorneys to begin laying the foundation for developing a reliable client base and stream of incoming work on a long-term basis.

Benefits of Speaking Engagements

The benefits of incorporating speaking engagements into your comprehensive marketing and business development campaign are substantial. Speaking engagements provide opportunities that put you directly in front of prospective buyers of legal services, key decision-makers, and influencers, giving you a rare, sought-after opportunity to interact with prospects one-on-one. This same personal interaction allows potential clients to get an in-depth sense of your personality and demeanor, which often plays a critical part in the selection of legal services. At the same time, speaking engagements also allow attorneys to *demonstrate*—rather than *sell*—their knowledge, skillset, and expertise.

In addition, speaking engagements also serve as a robust reputation and profile builder, which is essential in developing new business and clients. Importantly, when an attorney speaks on a topic of interest, that attorney positions himself or herself as a thought leader in the attorney's areas of practice and industries served, thus enhancing the attorney's reputation and elevating his or her visibility within the attorney's target markets.

How to Select & Secure Speaking Engagements

Speaking engagements are about extending your brand and cultivating leads for your individual legal practice and that of your law firm. As a starting point, determining the proper audience to present to is a key consideration that will ensure that you maximize the value of the time and effort that you will devote to speaking or presenting on a given subject. As such, the first step to speaking engagement success is to identify what type of clients and contacts you want to target. Once you have selected the audience you want to connect with, the next step is to determine your speaking venue. Here, it is key to be strategic in order to maximize the benefit and impact that your speaking engagement will have on your ability to bring in new clients and business. Your decision in this regard should be made based upon who will be in the room to hear your presentation, as opposed to how many people will be there, or where you will be speaking. Thus, when selecting your venue, it is important to understand where your target market(s) congregate, and which events—such as seminars and conferences—they most frequently attend. Keep in mind that industry seminars and conferences target potential clients and key decision-makers, while bar association speaking engagements target referral sources, *i.e.*, other attorneys who may be able to refer potential clients your way.

After determining your audience and venue, the next step is to select the subject or topic of your presentation or seminar. There are several ways to go about selecting an effective topic that will maximize the value of your speaking engagement. One effective method is to review legal and industry trade publications to discern any recent developments or trends in the areas of law in which you practice that may be of interest to your audience. Another effective method is to take a written article you have published and use that same subject matter as a playbook for your presentation material. In this respect, for every article you publish, you can use that same topic to speak about, and vice versa.

In some instances, you will have to submit a proposal and obtain an invite from the hosting organization in order to speak at a particular event or gathering. In this situation, you can maximize the likelihood of receiving an invite by offering to speak on a particularly significant, current trending topic or issue, which is much more likely to get selected. Not only do timely topics—such as key legal opinions, and relevant trends and developments in a given area of law—garner attendees' attention, but

they also attract the attention of conference and seminar organizers. In addition, another effective technique to land invite-only speaking engagements is to publish articles frequently in legal and trade publications. Once you have established yourself as a leading mind in a given area of law, many organization sponsors and hosts will find you extremely attractive to fill speaking slots at their invite-only events.

Preparing For the Speaking Engagement

After you have secured a speaking engagement with an audience of key decision makers and potential clients, the next step is to begin preparing your material for the presentation. When preparing the content for your speaking engagement, make sure you pay close attention to what will resonate with your audience. Presentations are only as good as your focus on

the audience. Understanding your audience's needs, priorities, and concerns is vital to putting together a successful presentation or speech. Even if you are able to wow the audience with your legal acumen or your technological savvy, your presentation will fall flat if you do not give the audience what it needs – which, depending on the situation, could be a challenge, beneficial information, or mere entertainment.

As the old adage says, “numbers tell, but stories sell.” When it comes to speaking engagements, truer words have never been spoken. Accordingly, give your audience the necessary facts, but also weave in stories to your presentation as well. In particular, consider inserting one or two “war stories” pertaining to your practice to emphasize to your audience that you are experienced in handling tough legal challenges, and that you can solve even the thorniest legal problems if called upon to do so.

It is also important to ensure that the content of your talk allows you to establish trust and credibility with your audience. When it comes to speaking engagements, your primary selling opportunity comes through demonstrating your legal knowledge and expertise, and your ability to solve your potential clients' real world legal problems. In doing so, your speech also inevitably demonstrates that your audience can trust you, which is the first step to establishing a relationship with a potential client who may be in need of your legal services.

Always leave time in your speech or presentation for a question-and-answer session. If you can successfully answer questions from your audience, you will leave a very favorable impression on those in attendance. Importantly, those same people who pose questions during a Q&A session are by far the most likely to become clients of yours down the line, so you want to make sure that you leave



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time at the end of your engagement to field questions from the audience.

In addition to the presentation itself, attorneys should also put together written materials that supplement their talk to disseminate to the audience either before or during the presentation. Consider useful tools, such as checklists, case updates, or lists of resources—something that audience members will use frequently—which will keep the speaker fresh on the audience’s mind long after the presentation itself is over. Furthermore, for any handout, make sure the material is branded, always include actionable takeaways for your audience members, and provide contact information so that attendees can follow up with you after the event for additional information or in the event your legal services and expertise become needed.

The Speaking Engagement Itself

If you have practiced and prepared adequately for your talk, your speaking engagement itself should be the easiest part of the process. With that said, there are a few ground rules that should be followed to guide you to a successful speech or presentation:

- Know your audience. You need to know whom you are speaking to in order to communicate effectively. Are you speaking to fellow lawyers, or members of a certain industry or trade? Once you know your audience, make sure to tailor your speech in a way that resonates with those in attendance.
- Start with a strong opening. This is known as the “hook,” which oftentimes comes in the form of a question or a story. Regardless of the form, your hook should instantly draw your audience in, putting them on the edge of their seat as they eagerly wait to hear more from you.
- Never read directly from a script or outline. Similarly, ensure that you do not come off too scripted or rigid during your speech. Rather, focus on speaking clearly and in a conversational manner to your audience. Avoid using legalese whenever possible.

- When giving your talk, try to *educate* your audience, as opposed to “telling” them information. Think of yourself as a holder of valuable information that you must share with those in attendance.
- End strong. At the conclusion of your presentation, summarize the information you really want the audience to take away from your talk.

After the Speaking Engagement

Importantly, to fully maximize the impact of a speaking engagement—and the likelihood of generating new business from a speech or presentation—a speaker must put in additional work even after his or her talk has concluded, which is known as the post-speech follow-up phase. For anyone you meet at the event and exchange business cards with, send an email within 48 hours after the event. And for select attendees who pose the potential of becoming clients sometime in the future, send a thank you letter along with additional information that they may find helpful. In doing so, however, avoid trying to overtly solicit business. Instead, simply try to establish a relationship and determine any ways that you can assist the potential client. At the same time, let the prospect know that he or she should feel free to reach out for you if he or she ever has a question or need.

The Final Word

For young lawyers, it is never too early to start seeking out opportunities to speak

and present at conferences, seminars, and other functions. Critically, as with any other marketing practice, a single presentation or speech—in and of itself—will do little to bolster a young attorney’s ability to bring in new business and clients. With that said, making speaking engagements a regular facet of your comprehensive marketing and business development campaign can go a long way toward attracting and securing new clients and business while, at the same time, significantly enhancing your reputation and profile. The earlier you begin to hit the speaking circuit as a young lawyer, the better you will get at the art of speaking and presenting, and the quicker you will begin to generate your own clients and business. The key is to get the ball rolling. Once that happens, one speaking opportunity will lead to another, and soon enough you will have organizations you have never heard of calling you and asking you to speak at their events. As such, all young attorneys are well advised to add speaking and presenting to their business development arsenals, which—if utilized effectively—will serve as a significant aid in generating business consistently on a long-term basis.

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