

Importance of Training



by William J. Flannery, Jr.

One or two rainmakers cannot carry your law firm through the 21st century. We need more lawyers out there who know how to get the most out of their marketing role. The answer lies in training.

The need for lawyer training hinges on how many firm rainmakers you want. Rainmakers are generally self-taught and their methods, although effective, may not be the one that novice marketers should learn and adopt. Professionals, however, can train lawyers to make marketing easier for them, to reduce the time commitment and to "fix their game".

Marketing is not a natural skill, but lawyers can develop it and the results are trained lawyers who consistently develop clients more effectively and profitably.

What benefits can your firm expect to derive from having your lawyers trained?

Training:

- Builds better communications skills.
- Develops hidden talent.
- Ensures consistent quality.
- Provides greater focus.
- Produces more effective/productive efforts.
- Clarifies the concept of marketing as a business process.

In the beginning, a firm should use professionals to train - at least the first time.

Choosing the right professional can be difficult and requires systematic review:

- Evaluate their experience.
- Sit in on a training session.
- Verify that they can withstand attack.
- See if they can look beyond the quick fix.
- Confirm that they provide an interactive program.
- Check references as to what training survived and how it has been used.

It's best not to use academics or professors who may not be practical in their approach; product sales instructors who know an entirely different process from the one that successfully markets services; accountants who the *Wall Street Journal* says know little about clients and less about the firm; and videos or tapes, which are only good support materials.

The best training programs are off-site in an atmosphere conducive to learning. The date should be scheduled well in advance, allowing time during the session for breaks. The best results are achieved in small group workshops and discussions using a hands-on style, as well as case studies and visuals.

Lawyers often fear the process, anticipating rejection or embarrassment or identification of their behavior as offensive. They may fail to see the many benefits of the training.

JoAnn Martindale, marketing director for Dallas' Gardere & Wynne, suggests that the lack of understanding and time constraints are obstacles to a training program.

Training builds teams by expanding a lawyer's knowledge of the firm, by teaching him or her to trust the skills of others, and by increasing the credibility of the in-house marketing professional. It also elevates awareness and the status of marketing, and creates tangible results as well as a monitoring system.

The best of all training worlds is the one-on-one approach, which combines skill building with encouragement of the conceptual thinking needed for successful marketing. The program should include a clear definition of marketing. Development of good communications skills and business psychology should be part of the program. Lawyers will be taught to conduct client meetings, make telephone calls, evaluate results, seize opportunities, and understand buyer psychology and motivation. Information gathering and use of supporting materials round out successful training programs.

Any training program must include practical applications, follow-up techniques that make the effort a habit, and both tangible and intangible rewards.

The real clue to successful training is the follow-through, which employs activity recaps, client reviews, plan revisions and assignments complete with deadlines.

After successful training, lawyers exhibit new skills, see new opportunities, have greater confidence and a sense of direction, contribute to the firm and are motivated to action. Training allows every lawyer to play a more significant role in the marketing process. Lawyers become an organized, focused and strategic force to be reckoned with.

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