Ten Tips to Add Octane to Your Business Development/Client Retention Activities

By Silvia L. Coulter

Here are some simple, yet often overlooked ways of adding some fuel to your business development activities. These tips are for seasoned rainmakers and young lawyers alike. It's all about the basics.

1. **Make it easy for people to do business with you**. Add your contact information to the emails you initiate and to the emails to which you reply. It's easy to do and it makes life much easier for people who are trying to find your contact information quickly if they can look you up in their email Inbox and see all your information on a past email.

2. **Categorize your contacts**. In Outlook, go to your "Contacts" folder and look for the "Category" label and click on it. You can add multiple (not too many!) categories to sort through your contacts quickly and efficiently. Most firm CRM databases easily transfer this information from Outlook to the database information you have on file. This allows you to then sort through your contacts for specific purposes (e.g., IP in house counsel would have IP as a category and In house counsel as another category). To do this efficiently, ask your assistant to print out your contacts for you. You can then create a legend and then code your list by the categories you want each contact to be labeled with. Some of the suggestions we have: industry; specialty; position; holiday card; a particular event or association, etc.

3. **Keep contact information in a user-friendly format**. Provide the opportunity for people to download your v-card directly from your bio or email. Then all your contacts have to do is click on your v-card and save it in their files. This is another way that you make it easy for them to do business with you. If they have to manually copy all your info from your bio or email, it may not get done. And then your contact information is not what's in their files.

4. **Rebuild past relationships.** So often we try to meet new people, when we already have a lot of good clients who are contacts. Make it a point to call every past client you've ever had. They are either a referral source or a source of new business (repeat business) for you. This is one of the best ways to obtain new business. Whether they are divorce clients, injury clients or top CEOs for whom you did a deal, call them to find out how they are doing. Go back at least ten years and make it a point to call to say hello and hear how their life/their business is going. You'll be amazed at the results.

5. **Thank your clients for doing business with you**. It may sound basic, but it's important – and it works. Make a special effort to write a hand-written note or place a phone call to each client and thank them for doing business with you/your firm. They will always appreciate the special effort.

6. **Send a gift**. Everyone likes presents. Send a book from the NY Times or other best-seller list. Or your favorite new book on leadership to senior executives with whom you do business. For people

who send referrals your way, thank them twice. First, acknowledge the referral and say that you appreciate that they are thinking of you enough to recommend you. Then, send a thank you gift for the gesture once you land a new client. These kinds of gestures are good manners and they go a long way toward building relationships.

7. **Know your clients.** Identify the top five clients with whom you work. Take each one to lunch and learn more about their business. If you are limited due to geographic distance, then go visit their web site and learn about their business goals and products by reading press releases, the CEOs mission statement and investor relations' pages if public. Ask them how they are doing this year with their goals. People like to know they matter to you and that you are interested. We hear all the time from clients of firms that few of their outside relationships ask these questions.

8. **Contact firm alumni.** Firm alumni represent a huge source of new business or referrals. This, quite simply, is almost always an untapped opportunity. Obtain the list from your HR or Recruiting team and email/dial away.

9. **Get set up on social networks.** Complete your profiles on social networks such as Linked In and Facebook so it's easy to find you—keep in mind you will want to maintain the utmost professional profile at all times. Again, make it easy for people to find you and to do business with you. Two more tips: ask an IT professional to provide you with a tutorial and check to see if your firm has a social networks policy.

10. **Think of three things to say that will make you memorable when you meet people**. Also known as your elevator speech, you need a snappy introduction. Don't just say you help businesses with their acquisitions for example, if you are an M&A lawyer. That's fairly forgettable. Try something like, "I am an avid skier and sailor and when I'm not enjoying those activities, I work at XXX law firm and help our clients with XX." They'll remember you the next time—give people opportunities to connect with you by making yourself interesting and memorable.

For more tips or information about business development and client growth services, please email Silvia at slcoulter@hildebrandt.com.