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LEGAL MARKETING

Every Lawyer in Your Firm Should Not Have a Marketing Plan

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Special to the Legal

There, I said it. You read this right. Every lawyer in your firm should not have a marketing plan. Sounds like heresy and the last thing you would expect me to say as a law firm marketing consultant hired to help lawyers implement plans. But I have thought long and hard about it.

THE PANIC THAT HIT LAW FIRMS

Over the last few troubled years, I have been hired by many small to midsized firms that have enunciated the very same concerns to me: “We want more work. We have a few rain-makers in the firm but that worries us. We want all of our partners to be motivated and get out there and have books of business. Stacy, teach them how to do it and make them get out there and get more work!”

I almost began to call what I was seeing the “legal flu” because so many firms seemed to be infected with this panic.

But what was really happening was that firms — hit by the recession — were taking, in some cases, their first hard look at who brought in the



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dollars to their firms and who did not. Once they discovered that their revenues were dependent on only a small handful of lawyers, they turned to me, as almost a last ditch effort to “fix” the other lawyers in their firms.

Managing partners have said to me: “We have too many unmotivated partners. What should we do?” In some cases, I directed them to an article by management consultant Joel Rose that appeared in the Nov. 3 *Legal Intelligencer* headlined “How to Take Action With Under-Utilized Firm Partners” in which Rose outlined how to handle unproductive and unmotivated lawyers. And guess what? His recommendations included cutting compensation, de-equitization and even layoffs. Not easy things for firms to do.

In my meetings with firms, I began to notice three themes:

- Those in leadership roles who were most upset with their fellow

non-producing partners did not wish to talk face-to-face with the lackluster lawyers to discuss the situation and the steps that would be taken if they did not change their behavior.

- Money, either more or less of it, did not seem to motivate this group of under-producing lawyers. Compensation did not incentivize them to get out the door to market.

- The unmotivated, non-producing partners did not want to change their behavior or work habits to include marketing.

During this time, I was getting hired to work with these lawyers to help them develop and implement solid marketing plans.

Throughout 2009, I was asked by numerous firms to sit down with their unmotivated lawyers and work out some plans that were doable in six months. I did, and in just about every case, the partners would willingly meet for an hour and listen politely.

But after our initial meeting, nothing happened. The lawyers did nothing to implement their plans. The firm leaders did nothing to review their plans and insist on implementation. Nothing. No change.

I used to be the one in the room heralding the fact that all lawyers should have a marketing plan in place. Because of my experiences

over the last year, I no longer feel that way. I have a new recommendation instead.

GROUP THREE IS KEY

I have divided the world of lawyers into three categories, which are present in just about every law firm today.

- Those who have books of business, targets in mind, proven “hunting skills” in place and who enjoy developing business get it.

- Those who don’t get or like business development will never get it and do not want to get it.

- Those in the middle who, with some training and guidance, could create a book of business and would be interested in doing so.

I now believe that firms should invest time and effort in working with those in Group Three to develop their business development antennae and put great plans in place.

In my opinion, firms will see a much greater return by focusing marketing dollars on those lawyers who want to grow their books. These are the folks consultants or managing partners should work with one-on-one to develop smart and effective plans.

Does this mean that these other partners should be ignored and let alone to just practice law? No. They must be given new roles in marketing — behind-the-scenes roles with which they are comfortable and that are supportive of the firm’s marketing efforts.

For example, a partner who does not want to market can be asked to develop preventative checklists for clients in his or her practice area. He or she can monitor legislation or

enforcement efforts on the state and federal level so clients can be alerted. A lawyer can take the reins of setting up a contact/client relationships management database for the firm.

In short, firms in 2010 should focus their efforts on lawyers who truly want and will benefit from help and on creating critically important behind-the-scenes roles for their partners disinterested in ever having their own clients.

I should add that I think that all lawyers can benefit from some marketing education, so group training sessions led by experts should be part of a firm’s 2010 plans. One helpful tip dispensed at a training program may resonate with some of these non-producers, like how to improve their 30-second elevator speech, how to properly shake hands, how to network easily, how to go deep in a trade organization and much more.

THE NEW ACTION PLAN FOR GROWTH

So, Step 1: Identify the lawyers in Group Three per above. Have them make a list of the current client relationships they will grow, new clients they will go after and referral sources they will woo in 2010 (otherwise known as their individual marketing plans).

Step 2: The firm leadership should review the plans, meet with each lawyer individually and offer firm support to achieve the stated goals, including the possible creation of new firm tools, blogs, personal stationary, staff assistance or the help of an outside consultant.

Step 3: Next, firm leadership should identify ways for those in

Group Two to help those in Group Three achieve their goals. Specific assignments should be handed out.

Step 4: After three months, firm leadership should gather all partners together to review the status of everyone’s efforts, discuss the successes and challenges some have had and decide upon the next steps that each lawyer should take. Repeat this group “review” every three months.

Step 5: This is the tough one. Managing partners: Enjoy your higher revenues, your smaller bills from outside marketing consultants, more tranquil days (since you will have less frustration with partners in Group Two) and a happier workforce. •