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Grow Your Revenues by Creating Formal Referral Networks Now

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Special to the Legal

One of the fastest ways to grow your practice is to create (and then worship) your referral network. There are several ways to create them. Here are a few:

Create a network with lawyers and law firms with whom you do not compete:

- First, identify the areas you and your firm do not practice in. Make a list. Then, look in your sphere of connections for a lawyer who has impressed you who is a practitioner in that area. If you know of no one, check with the alumni office of your law school for help to identify law school classmates who are in that field. LinkedIn has a wonderful “alumni” tab for colleges and law schools (and even some high schools) that lets you know where your classmates are working and what they are doing now. But if all of this does not reveal



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someone to whom you can refer to with confidence, check out who heads up the local bar committee for the practice area.

- Then, meet. Invite the lawyer to have lunch and explain that you are building a referral network and would like to hear what their practice is like, what a great client looks like to them, what their favorite kinds of matters are and more. Explain that you want to have their practice “top of mind” status. Who would not come to this lunch? Who would not be incredibly grateful that you want to think about their practice and potentially send them work. Because of this, they

will then ask you how they can help you, and it is now your turn to gush about your practice. This works, folks.

- Two more times. That’s right, I—and many of my colleagues—believe your referral bench should be three-deep for each area in which you do not practice. Giving out three referrals instead of just one makes three lawyers love you for thinking of them—instead of just one—and it gives the person seeking a referral more vetted choices to find the right match.

- Next, calendar a “touch” that inures to the personal or professional benefit of your referral sources every quarter. I have a three-page list of what I tell my clients to consider doing to make a referral source’s life better. Worship your referral sources and you will remain top-of-status with them.

Create a network of nonlawyers who serve one of your key clients:

- Take a hard look at your two to three favorite clients and identify the outside service providers they depend on including accountants, brokers, bankers, risk advisers, facilities management, payroll and anyone else that is central to their financial well-being.

- Bring these folks together to discuss ways to better serve your common client and how to help other businesses in the industry. I have seen groups like this formed who then meet quarterly to discuss trends, developments and more that each member is seeing from his perspective—that can help others in the group. Good referrals have come out of these purposeful networks.

Create a demographic “affinity” network:

- A while back, I set up a network of great women lawyers who did not compete. It was thrilling to watch these lawyers happily interact and get to know one another and referrals did come out of it. I continue to set up my clients with one another based on gender and other shared affinities. There is a very generous spirit that is present among people who share something very important to them—even some part of their DNA. There are numerous local chambers of commerce for different countries and there are local bar associations that are based on race, ethnicity, heritage and more. Look at some

of your personal demographics and see whether there is a referral group that you can set up based on common interests of some kind. I recently heard of a local college that does not have a law school—that created an affinity group for graduates who are now lawyers. Anecdotally, this week, I heard a referral came out of that group.

Look at some of your personal demographics and see whether there is a referral group that you can set up based on common interests of some kind.

- Geographic affinity referral networks can be set up as well—whereby an attorney can reach out to others who are not in their zip code or even state to look for referrals.

- An easy affinity network could be members of your high school or college class. You as the lawyer act as the spoke and bring together classmates in all different nonlegal disciplines who could benefit from referrals from one another.

Again, once you have a created a relationship with a referral source—or created a network, you are not “one and done.” You

will need to calendar touches that remind your referral source that you are thinking about their practice and ways to help them.

A final suggestion. All of us have dentists, doctors, bankers, hair stylists, favorite restaurants and others in our lives who we buy a service from on a regular basis. Look at the charges or checks you have incurred for the last six months and identify which professionals you bought a service from. Do they know what you do? Can they talk about the kinds of pain you solve or successes you have had with family, friends and associates in their world? Can they be clients of yours? It is your job really to make sure they can! Let the folks you are spending your hard-earned dollars on be brand ambassadors for what you do. Sit back then, and watch the referrals grow!

As always, I am rooting for you! •