

Reimagining Business Development Training And Coaching

Six Pillars of a Successful Bus-Dev Program

By Debra Baker

If you were to poll the attorneys in your firm about whether business development is an expectation or an option, would you get a consistent answer?

High performing firms are increasingly investing earlier and more often in attorney business development coaching and training. This is good news for a profession that historically looked down on business development as being beneath the character of a lawyer. Increasingly lawyers are recognizing that sales is about helping solve problems that need to be solved

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— an extension of rather than an adjunct to legal excellence.

For firms wanting to thrive through the next economic downturn and beyond, mastery of business development fundamentals is as essential as mastering legal skills. Yet training and coaching — whether done internally or through outside consultants — requires an investment in time and resources. Given the demands of the “doerseller” role that attorneys must play to build successful practices, getting it right requires a holistic approach to business development training across the attorney life cycle.

Topping the list of critical success factors: A shared mindset and consistent communication about business development expectations. Too often, the path to partnership is ambiguous when it comes to business

development requirements — e.g., “shows an aptitude for business development.” Once making partner, the expectations change, but the clarity around what success looks like and how it is measured may not be as clear to the front line as it is to the management team.

1. CURRICULUM

The first step to building a great business development curriculum, therefore, is a set of governing principles and philosophies about business generation requirements, so that individual attorneys can prioritize their own development efforts.

Here are five additional factors you should consider when building out your business development curriculum:

2. METHODOLOGY

Sales fundamentals are universal, but in a professional services

organization where only part of the job requirement is business development, consistency is key. Having an anchoring device around which to frame, communicate, and develop curriculum will help support the creation of a business development culture.

3. CURRICULUM DESIGN

The most effective training programs are those that leverage adult learning principles and recognize the interconnectivity between mastering sales fundamentals (the what), ongoing skill building (the how), and ongoing reinforcement training to maintain momentum, develop confidence and accelerate results (the “way”).

4. LEARNING LOOP

A learning loop allows attorneys to receive the right training at the right time and to promote continuous learning at each stage of their career. For example, level appropriate business development skill building should start early in an associate's career, so that by the time they make partner, they have been exposed to all of the business development fundamentals. At the same time, once an attorney makes partner, the sense of urgency and circumstances change. Reinforcement and situational training becomes more important, but it also must build on the

foundational skills and not just replicate them.

This is where situational training is critical. For example, cross-selling through an industry group is different than selling a single service. Selling a team is different than selling a person. Sales fundamentals are no different for women or people of color, but their experiences in the sales process may be different. Not all situations apply to all lawyers, but they are areas where situational training can reinforce and accelerate the results of even the most experienced lawyers.

5. COLLABORATORS

Research suggests that a mix of internal and external trainers, coaches and facilitators provide more “stickiness” to business development programs. But while diverse views and experiences are essential, they must still support the underlying philosophies and culture of the firm.

6. BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT

Training doesn't stay sticky unless it can be applied on a consistent and ongoing basis. Many firms have mastered this when it comes to professional development around skills like conducting depositions or negotiations, so they can be applied consistently across a team. The same can be done for business

development if the business development tools and templates used in real time are the same that attorneys have been exposed to in training.

CONCLUSION

As professional development, marketing and business-development leaders work to invest in building the right programming for their attorneys, they also are learning that more goes into success than just good curriculum. Applied holistically, these six pillars of a successful business development program provide the opportunity to build a stronger bench of business developers and to better engage and energize attorneys for growth.



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