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DEVELOPMENT COUNSEL

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Business development beyond the bounds

When all is said and done, marketing programs, profile raising, and collateral only go so far.

Successful business development is largely about attitudes, behaviours, habits and rituals, together with a few well conceived and effectively executed activities.

By embracing business development practices and techniques which go well beyond the bounds of 'normal' or ordinary, you can bring about extraordinary results.

Beyond the bounds ideas

Here are just a few 'beyond the bounds' ideas.

Client centric communication

Whether proposing, presenting or simply persuading a prospective client to entrust you with their work, you will create a much more compelling argument if you make it 'client centric' rather than 'your firm centric'.

Client as subject

Rather than boasting about what you do, or talking about your firm, frame your message with the client as the subject.

Don't write in terms of 'we have 20 lawyers ...'; instead, the more effective approach is 'you, client x, will have access to a team of 20 experienced lawyers, each of whom knows your industry'.

Instead of saying 'our legal team will be headed by Kim Smith' it's better to say 'client x legal team will be led by Kim Smith' or 'your legal service team will be led by ...'.

Imbue your pitch with benefits

Better than simply claiming 'we have great expertise', frame it as 'you will benefit from our expertise in these ways ...'.

Show commitment and promise

Rather than the general claim that 'we keep up to date with all developments', it's far more persuasive to say 'you, client x, can depend upon us to keep fully up to date with all developments in your field'.

This 'client centric' approach is far more persuasive, will have greater impact, and is much more likely to succeed.

Camp out with clients

Wherever possible and feasible, spend time 'camping out' in the offices and facilities of business clients.

Any natural scientist will tell you that to understand an organism you need to observe it in its habitat. One great example is the giraffe: seen in the zoo it is amazing — tall, magnificent, exotic, even weird. However, watching a giraffe on the African savannah, you see an animal that is no longer weird — it reaches food sources that are out of range to its competitors — it is perfectly adapted to its habitat.

Natural science offers valuable lessons, there are strong parallels between the giraffe anecdote and lawyers' experiences with clients.

In the rarefied atmosphere of your office, various client attributes or actions will seem unbelievable or inexplicable. Observing that same client on their own territory may put things into context. Better still, you'll learn many things to help you tailor advice to their business circumstances. You'll show you care. You'll demolish barriers. Best of all, you'll improve your prospects of coming away with another matter.

Camping out with clients extends to working side by side with them as they deal with their customers, suppliers and business challenges.

This isn't a magical panacea: it doesn't replace calm, cool headed, objective analysis and expert counsel. Just because you develop insight into the forces at play in your client's world doesn't mean you can instantly solve all their problems, let alone save them from themselves.

But the camping out experience should ratchet up by quite a few notches your influence, persuasion and value.

Cohabit with your client

Cohabiting — temporarily 'living with' — your client, to work on a project, turns conventional logic on its head.

It can pay huge dividends to forsake your comfortable, convenient habit of holing up in your own offices — especially for intense, pressured, time critical projects. There's no easier way to get client input to a critical project

than to cohabit with them.

The best service solutions to complex problems are rarely developed by a single professional operating in isolation. Think of it as a duet rather than a solo performance.

Your client needs to be seamlessly part of any complex project, from the beginning right to the end.

By cohabitating through a project, you'll draw your client into an intense problem solving frame. You'll create a powerful intimacy. You'll learn, teach and demonstrate just how much knowledge, expertise, resources and time you're contributing. You'll get close to information resources. You'll be able to moderate any wild demands. Best of all, you'll be able to craft and co-produce a cohesive solution robust enough to last long after you've moved out.

Here are a few cohabitation guidelines:

- check top level, quality client personnel commitment to availability;
- live for your client while you cohabit — you don't have to be there 100 per cent of the time, but you mustn't just move your other work onto their premises;
- actively transfer knowledge and skills;
- leverage every opportunity to increase intimacy and co-identification; and
- don't just survive it, enjoy it! ●



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