

THERE is a story about a US Senator who visits a local award-winning hospital. He gets out of his chauffeur driven car and approaches the main entrance of the hospital in the company of the hospital director. Wanting to appear a man of the people, he addresses a young janitor who is emptying bins close to the entrance. "Tell me, young man, what do you do here?" Expecting a reply about keeping the place clean and tidy or something similar, the senator is surprised when the janitor declares: "Sir, I save lives."

Everyone's daily tasks in the hospital may be different, but all are trying essentially to achieve the same thing — saving lives. No doubt, this understanding on the part of all the employees went some way to explaining how that particular hospital had managed to differentiate itself from the others and win the award.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

EVERYONE'S A RAINMAKER

There are four steps to attract clients and win mandates, but you don't have to be a hotshot partner to do it. Chris Scoble* explains

I wonder what the answer to that same question would be if it were put to the receptionist at a law firm? Apart from the unremarkable: "I answer the telephone" or "I look after our clients when they come into the office", would there be any responses that really encompass the wider remit of the office? "I help solve our clients' problems", for example.

Although the concept of rain-making is normally associated with "sales", I have deliberately given these examples that focus on the "service" elements of an organisation. This is because I see the two elements as being fundamentally linked. You so often hear the words these days: "It's no longer enough just to be a good, technical lawyer." So, what is it that can make the difference and help a firm gain and retain the best clients and assignments? The answer lies in the way a firm builds and develops its relationships — not just partner to client, but in every contact that every individual in the firm has with the client. A really strong relationship, that engages both parties, involves a range of people in both organisations and which looks at things from the other side's point of view, will develop and last to produce positive results for both sides.

So what practical steps can a firm and its people take as they look to develop new relationships, and therefore new business? I see four simple steps, none of which involves the use of the un-



loved “sales” word:

1. Make contact: it may sound simple, but if you are not out there making contact with people, then you will never generate any new relationships. The opportunities are wide, ranging from arranging or participating conferences and seminars through to making the most of social opportunities or just making the effort to talk to someone you meet in the lift. Of course, not every contact will lead to business, but the more you make, the more chances you have of success.

2. Show interest: people love talking about themselves, so ask them questions to give them the opportunity to do so! You can ask them about themselves as individuals or as the representative of their organisation. Either way, you will be finding things out that will serve as useful natural hooks⁷ and make your follow-up contact so much more genuine.

3. Offer suggestions: by offering suggestions, you are showing that you are putting yourself in their

client is facing. At that point, you can ask them: “Would you like us to help you with that?” or — if the relationship is developing really well — they may simply invite you to send in a proposal. Yes, it does happen. By focusing on the relationship, the “sale” can very often look after itself.

Times are changing and more impersonal ways of allocating business are increasingly seen, for example, with competitive pitch processes and panels. These will necessarily require a more sophisticated approach, but the importance of the underlying relationship should never be forgotten as you put the finishing touches to the final version of the pitch document. People buy from people.

What relevance does all this have to everyone being a rainmaker? One definition of the word “rainmaker” is someone who has “an exceptional ability to attract clients”. By implication, that does not have to be the person who actually does the work, so there is no reason why everyone in the or-



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tions, but there is no reason why they should not be active in making contact, showing interest and, indeed, in offering suggestions.

But what can a firm do to instil this overriding sense of customer focus throughout the entire staff population, and empower everyone to support actively the business development process — albeit in the early stages? Target-setting may seem rational but often serves only to generate the wrong sort of behaviours. What is required is a shared sense of what those behaviours should be. That can, of course, be developed through appropriate training sessions, followed by internal or external coaching. However, the best way really to engage people is by setting the example from the top. A partner who rigorously applies the four-step process in his or her interactions, with clients and all colleagues within the firm, will engender the desired behaviours across his or her team. With everyone pulling in the same direction, client satisfaction will reach new levels, and new business will flow naturally through the doors. ■

There is no reason why everyone in the firm should not be involved in the common goal to generate more work

shoes and trying to help them, with — at this stage — no expectation of reward. Suggestions can range from ideas for their business (“Have you thought about...?”), to helpful personal introductions to a restaurant, a builder or perhaps a holiday destination.

4. Provide solutions: once you have shown interest and proved that your interest is genuine by offering suggestions, your conversations will inevitably unearth a problem that your potential new

organisation should not be involved in the common goal to generate more work. Just think about it. A firm of 20 partners may have 60 associates and 40 non-legal staff. Partners will be expected to bring in the lion’s share of the business, but what about harnessing the skills and connections of the other hundred members of the team who all have an interest in the success of the organisation? Receptionists may not often get involved in providing legal solu-

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