

What are my chances? The 3 Biz Dev Conversations to Master

The “sales cycle” is a key element that comes up when working with attorneys on their marketing and business development plans. I worked with an attorney who was the absolute best at networking, meeting people, having meaningful conversations and converting all the above into not only contacts for his network but also friendships. The problem ... he would always hit the proverbial wall when it came to “the ask.”

I worked with another attorney for whom the mere thought of walking into a networking situation caused a borderline panic attack. If she did make it past the door, she was so uncomfortable that any conversations were awkward and unrewarding.

Both of these situations have something in common: the fear of rejection. Let’s face it – it happens to all of us, and it’s a valid emotion. The key for these situations was to identify where the fear came into play, and design a plan to work around it or go at it another way. For instance, I told the second attorney to stop going to networking events altogether. There were other ways to accomplish her business development plan, and putting herself in a horrible situation repeatedly was not the answer!

At last week’s LMA annual conference, the session on “[Socrates’s Briefcase: The Three BD Conversations Every Lawyer Needs to Master](#),” presented by Steve Hughes, President at Hit Your Stride, LLC, intrigued me because I am often asked about how to handle the different “cycles” of the sales process. Some attorneys struggle with several cycles, while some get stumped on just one or two. Steve broke down the business development process into three key steps that what I believe are easy to implement.

The Question

As an attorney, what is your answer when someone asks what you do? We learned from Steve that most lawyers get this wrong because they use a noun (or name their firm) to respond. For example, your answer may be as simple as “I’m an attorney” or “I work at AAA law firm.”

Steve’s recommendation is to provide a “Tell Me More” (TMM) statement instead. He has an acronym to help remember what a Tell Me More statement should be: S.I.P.S – **S**hort, **I**ntriguing, **P**ithy and **S**imple. Using this technique naturally causes people to ask you to expand on your answer. For example, instead of “I am an M&A attorney,” your TMM statement could be “I write pre-nups for corporations.” Steve worked with an attorney whose TMM statement was “I work with dead people” instead of “I am a will and probate attorney.” Talk about grabbing someone’s attention right away!

Your S.I.P.S. doesn’t have to be humorous and “out there.” It can be created by asking



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yourself the following questions during the first stage of the business development cycle:

- “What do I like best about what I do?”
- “How do I make the world better for my clients?”
- What happened on your very best day as a lawyer?
- Why do clients come to you?
- What problems do you solve?
- How can you wrap yourself in the larger successes of your firm?

Whatever you decide for your TMM statement, just remember that your goal is to get your listener to ask more about you. The TMM statement not only jump-starts the conversation, but keeps it going. It also creates a relaxed and more-natural exchange, puts your listener at ease, and gives you the opportunity to speak positively about yourself and your practice without boasting about how great you and your law firm are. Just remember to concentrate on who you help, the problems you solve for them and what influences them to hire you. This is a great start because your TMM statement also gets you to “the Bridge.”

The Bridge

The second step in the business development process that Steve defined was “**the Bridge,**” which is where you’re gathering the most-important information while doing the most-important thing: listening intently! If done correctly, your TMM statement has also allowed you to ask others about what they do. You want to get people to talk about their business. Steve recommends keeping the following in mind when you’re asking people about their business:

- What is their pain?
- What keeps them up at night?
- What are their challenges?
- What would make their world better?

At this point, just listen for “flashes”— things they may say that could create an opportunity for you and your firm. Don’t interrupt ... just make a mental note of the trigger you just heard and save it for when it’s your turn to speak.

When it is your turn to speak, Steve recommends responding by:

- Identifying the main reasons why clients retain you and your firm.
- Showing where you and your firm are a “fit” for their problem(s) and that you can solve it(them).

Steve discussed a brilliant process for completing these two points. He calls them your T.H.R.L. (thrill) lines. Take a look:

- “Clients **T**urn to me when ...”
- “Clients **H**ire us when ...”
- “Clients **R**each out to use when ...”
- “Clients **L**ook to me when ...”

These are awesome because they let you describe, in an exact way, to your prospect that you have solved the same issues and pains they are experiencing. You're checking the box of "credibility" without boasting.

It's also very important to remember two things during the "bridge" step: Do more listening than talking, and please do *not* talk about how great your firm is!

Finally, the Close

This is where the first attorney I described above would come to a screeching halt. I've heard the sales process, and especially the close, described as a dance. I'm not so sure about that, but it is safe to say that it's going to be different for everyone because experience, personality, the real-time situation and many other factors can play a role. Let's back into it by defining what *not* to do.

According to Steve, the three mistakes that attorneys make when trying to close are **never asking, asking too soon** and **asking incorrectly**. Let's break these down.

The "Never Asking" goes back to the fear of rejection, which can be fueled by lack of confidence. Honestly, this could be a matter of practice makes (somewhat) perfect to lessen your fear of rejection. You will need to get in this situation multiple times to learn from it and become better at it.

If you have completed the "Question" and "Bridge" steps, you have set yourself up for success at the "Close" step. However, here are a few more questions to ask to get your prospect to define their pains a little bit further:

- "Have you thought about what will happen if the problem you described doesn't change or get resolved?"
- "How is this problem affecting you, your department, your job?"
- "How is this affecting the company?"
- "Is this costing you time? Is this costing you money? Is this costing you employees?"
- "Can you give me an example?"

Now you have more valuable information and have positioned yourself to simply tell your story at this point, which is how you have solved those same pains in the past. Keep in mind, however, to make certain that your story speaks only to the issues that were raised and are important to your listener.

Now, "the Ask" – you've come this far, so don't stop now. Your ask could be as simple as:

- "I am intrigued by your challenges and excited about knowing I've solved these same issues for my clients in the past. I would love the opportunity to help you."
- "The issues we have discussed are definitely in my wheelhouse, and I welcome the opportunity to not only solve the problems we talked about today but also create a plan on how to avoid them from happening again."
- "I understand that you may not completely 'own' the issue or be the decision-maker to hire me. Will you introduce me to the stakeholders so I can give them the same information that I gave you? It would be awesome to make you the problem-solver for

this long-standing issue!"

"Asking Before They Are Ready"

It goes without saying that sometimes, it's just not the right time. The conversation did not lend itself to your pulling useful information from your prospect that you can act upon or use to provide past success stories. That's okay, because maybe your "close" at this point is just to get another meeting. This is another "gut check," but also the moment to ask yourself if you've been able to complete the Question and the Bridge successfully. You may just need to allow yourself more "discovery" time and ask for another meeting or offer to look into an updated regulation or recent case law, or provide a helpful policy document.

"Asking Incorrectly"

One of my favorite lines in a movie (and you'll know the movie) is "So, you're saying there's a chance?" Sometimes, lawyers make the mistake of not being direct with their ask and not stating exactly what they want. They do this because they are afraid of being pushy or too assertive. The problem is that this leaves your prospect either confused (they're not quite sure what you're asking) or tees up the perfect opportunity for them to provide an answer that lets them leave the conversation. The key here is to use an assertive form of communication.

- Instead of "I *think* that my firm *could possibly* be a match and *hope* you think of us for your next matter ..."
- Your response should be, "I *completely* understand your pain because I've walked clients through the exact same situation. I *know* that I can help you and look forward to working with you."

Steve also recommends asking a yes or no question. Be specific, and make it about them.

- "I'd like to get together to discuss next steps and strategies, because you shouldn't have to deal with these problems any longer. I want to help. Based on what we have discussed, I know that I can help you resolve the issues you're having. Do you agree? "

I would like to add a special note about getting a "no" or, in the case of the above-mentioned movie, "more like one out of a million." Please change your mindset about getting a "no" being perfectly okay. This allows you to move on and focus on finding the next win. It's respectful of your time and theirs.

Finally, the situation above obviously has many possible variations and is more than likely to take place over several interactions, not just one meeting or discussion. However, the principles can be applied in all of the "Three BD Conversations Every Lawyer Needs to Master."

I was so grateful to attend Steve's session and would like to thank Steve for being so gracious with his time during and after the conference.

Reach out to me, Glennie Green, at ggreen@jafep.com to learn more about how I can

assist you in your business development needs.