

Accountability Questions for Business Development Coaching Success

Having a successful career means different things to different lawyers, and at different times along their professional paths. It can mean having a track record of major trial wins, or becoming partner, or achieving recognition and awards, or being a rainmaker. Reaching those goals requires help from and collaboration with others — more-senior partners, clients, referral sources, associates, administrative support, even family and friends. Those relationships are key to achieving goals, but unfortunately, law schools focus on teaching the art of law, and not so much on the art of connections.

Working with a business development coach is an investment in yourself that can bring about career success by having a deliberate strategy in place. A willingness to participate, prioritizing time needed for assignments, trusting the coach and the process — these are, at a minimum, what a lawyer needs to expect of themselves when working with a coach. But what are the expectations that lawyers should have of a business development coach to make your program investment of time and money a success?

Here are several aspects to consider and questions to ask before embarking on a plan with a business development coach.

Commitment correlation

Lawyers aren't the only ones who need to commit to the coaching program — the coach does, as well.

Results from the program will happen when both parties are committed to it, and the level of success will only correlate to the efforts put in by each, not just the lawyer. Is your coach well prepared for your monthly calls? Have they also given themselves their own assignments that they hold themselves accountable to you? Are they your true partner?

Ask: Will your coach commit themselves to you throughout the whole program, so you know what to expect from them at each stage, and how will they do that?

Mindset matters

Does your coach know how to alleviate your concerns, whether it's about time required each week, realistic levels of involvement or even fears of failure?

The most-frequent reason that business development coaching fails is once we have done the intake interview and have created their plan, the attorney then truly realizes how much they need to do — and that can be overwhelming. The commitment to work with a coach requires a consistent effort or it cannot work," said Glennie Green, a



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“Attorneys will stress about their involvement and time, make excuses, and reduce their original commitment. My job is to make an immediate shift to help them get past the panic and break down their plan into smaller, more-doable action items that can take only a few minutes a day rather than many hours each week. I also work with them to identify their advocates – assistants, paralegals, the firm’s librarians – others they can partner with to achieve their action items.”

An example of helping with mindset involves an attorney whom Green coaches who is the owner and managing partner of his firm and also has a busy practice. “He has made a commitment to conduct a certain number of meetings a month with current and potential referral sources,” she said. “He enlists a paralegal in the office to help schedule those meetings, as well as maintain his ‘marketing’ calendar. This allows him to keep his focus on his practice and manage the firm. He regularly checks his calendar for new appointments, and he says he looks forward to seeing whom he will meet with next. Once he realized that he didn’t have to do it all and enlisted some help, his plan and marketing goals became not only manageable but systematic.”

Ask: How will your coach handle your unforeseen mindset barriers?

Cult of personality

A business development coach must apply understanding personality types to create a program with appropriate tactics and actions that will be realistic for the attorney. An introverted lawyer will benefit from coaching assignments that support their inherent style, and it’s the coach’s job to elicit that understanding of personality early in the engagement. An extroverted lawyer requires a different approach.

“I can’t expect a lawyer who has a type-A personality to be satisfied with only smaller, one-to-one relationship-building activities, but I have to come up with a plan that will keep that personality engaged, perhaps at a faster pace. I need to know what resonates with different kinds of personalities that will keep them interested, and when to recognize something isn’t working and why, to change direction,” said Green.

Ask: Will your business coach work to assess and consider your personality and incorporate your preferred working style part of the program?

Circle of trust

New attorneys have different coaching needs from senior colleagues. “The way I work with partners who have established careers is very different from how I engage with a young associate. Even a senior associate has different needs at that stage of their career than a new lawyer fresh out of school,” said Green.

Green has found that the sooner an attorney incorporates business coaching into their practice, the better, but the process is valuable for established lawyers as well. “It is never too early to start learning skills for developing relationships that can drive new business, nor is it too late for a partner with 20 years of experience to learn how to create

new contacts to grow their professional network," she said. "Not doing this could be due to unfamiliarity with the latest technology tools, needing help to reach out to other professionals in a new industry or help with building up a new practice area."

Green applied one strategy to alleviate concerns from Ashley Saenz, a first-year associate with the criminal defense firm Whalen Law Office in Texas, about not yet having a network as a recent law school graduate. Green reminded her that all her peers from the same school felt the same way, and that their network did exist "with each other. Saenz and her coach set out to create a circle of trust among those classmates that would help them learn how to leverage each of their connections within their own law firms as they began their careers.

"Instead of simply having me attend an alumni event, my business development coach helped me to start a referral group of my own with my group of friends from law school. We've met up a few times now and are getting together consistently in the name of marketing and growing each other's networks. We also are watching each other grow professionally," said Saenz.

"As a young associate attorney, I've loved the opportunity to work with a business development coach! In a few short months, I've seen my network increase tremendously. My coach not only encourages me to do the basic law firm marketing things (blog posts, alumni events, etc.), but she took my personality and interests into account and tailored my business development plan to me. She makes sure it's tailored to what I'm passionate about and what I enjoy doing. She also attended a lunch meeting with me to meet with potential referral sources. I have a true partner in my coach to help me accomplish my marketing goals."

Ask: How will your coach develop a program that fits your personality and level of professional experience?

Integrating PR with BD

A good business development coach will have many tools in their toolbox and be able to design an integrated business development plan with a variety of strategies that complement relationship-building activities and opening doors. Public relations efforts are ideal for working alongside business development and should always be included. However, public relations efforts can be another roadblock in the mindset of the attorney that needs to be overcome.

One way to establish thought leadership is to write articles that get published where a key audience is likely to read them, such as in industry trade magazines or on such websites. Co-authoring with a partner, an associate or a client can provide further exposure because they will share the published pieces with their networks.

Posting these articles to your bio and sharing it on the firm's and your social media channels amplifies the reach and provides additional reasons to engage with your contacts on a meaningful level.

To take it a step further, repurpose an article as a proposal for your coach to submit to

your target industry associations to support potential speaking engagements, or create an hour CLE to provide to your attorney referral sources. A good business development coach will design a plan that uses multiple strategies to implement your action items in various channels, which makes efficient and effective use of your marketing (i.e., nonbillable) time.

Ask: Is your coach prepared to recommend and support other types of marketing activities that will align with your personal business development goals?

The success of a coaching program is measured not only by your own willing engagement, but the active involvement of a coach who becomes invested in your success, participates in the program along with you, understands your needs and challenges, and requires accountability from both themselves and you.

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