

Mindset Is Key to Business Development

Attorneys hear the words business development (BD) and often cringe. They either believe they don't have time (non-billable time), they think they don't know how to do BD, or they're introverted and the very thought of small talk with strangers sends their anxiety into a tailspin.

These initial beliefs, thoughts and feelings are immediately setting you up for failure, though. Feelings and beliefs do not drive your thoughts. In fact, it's the other way around: Your thoughts determine your feelings and actions. Your mindset matters.

According to Amy Morin, psychotherapist and international bestselling mental strength author, "Your thoughts are a catalyst for self-perpetuating cycles. What you think directly influences how you feel and how you behave, so if you think you're a failure, you'll feel like a failure. Then, you'll act like a failure, which reinforces your belief that you must *be* a failure."

But what does this have to do with business development for lawyers? If you're approaching business development with a mindset focused on lack of time or anxiety about the process, that's exactly what it will feel like when you approach a prospective client and the outcome is likely not to be a success. By [approaching business development with an open or growth mindset](#), you're setting your intentions to be productive.

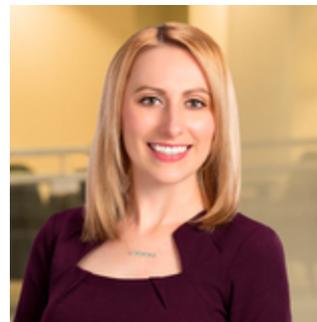
Approach Business Development with a Growth Mindset

1. Tell Yourself that Business Development Equals More Business. This could be more clients to counsel, more financial freedom, more vacations, more clients in your portfolio leading to a promotion – anything that motivates you to work. This is your why; the reason you became a lawyer and the reason you continue to work day in and out.

The mindset shift that BD equals more replaces the perception that it takes up too much non-billable time. You begin to move out of the "lacking time" framework and into an "open for business" framework. Prospective clients and referral sources notice the difference. It's not hard to spot the person at the networking event who has a chip on their shoulder because they don't think they have the time to be there. Would you want to work with someone who doesn't think they have the time for you? Would you even want to start a conversation with someone like that?

When you're invited or scheduled to go to a [networking event](#), instead of groaning at the email, say to yourself, "This could lead to more clients." Repeat this on the day of the event and even as you walk into the event. Your attitude will change for the better, and your results will improve as a result.

2. Take a Positive Approach. Many attorneys I encounter believe they're only good at their



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legal practice. They tell me they don't know how to do business development. Then the next sentence out of their mouth is "I meet with contacts for lunch and drinks weekly." That *is* business development. The nature of the legal industry forces attorneys to be perfectionists. This leads many to believe that if they aren't perfect at something, then they aren't good at it. But this lack mindset isn't serving you.

Business development is not rocket science. It's simply building relationships. If you have friends, a partner or a community, you've built relationships. Here again is a mindset shift. Stop saying you don't know how to do BD or you're not good at BD. Start telling yourself you know how to build relationships, you're great at business development, you can strike up a conversation with anyone. Tell this to yourself even if you don't fully believe it yet. The more you say it, the more you're re-wiring your brain to believe it and the more it will become a reality.

You might be thinking that this is a lot like the SNL skit with Stuart Smalley saying, "I'm good enough, I'm smart enough, and doggone it, people like me." Well, it is a little like that, but maybe not as silly as on SNL.

This method is backed by science. It's referred to as neuroplasticity, which is the brain's ability to modify, change and adapt both structure and function throughout life.

3. You Don't Know Until You Try It. For the introverted attorney, the excuse is often "I'm not outgoing enough to do business development, this is simply an excuse. There are many options to BD beyond attending a networking event or happy hour. You can invite a client to a one-on-one lunch. You can schedule a video or traditional phone call. You can reach out and [make new connections on LinkedIn](#). There is even the tried-and-true contacting someone in your network and asking for an introduction to a person in the industry where you're looking to build connections. You may think this sounds salesy, but I assure you it is done daily and is how many successful business relationships are made.

The key to all these examples is that you truly don't know how you are at BD strategies until you try each one of them. Saying you're an introvert won't cut it and won't get you more clients, financial freedom or anything else you desire from building a book of business.

Shifting your mindset to believing in your BD skills will open doors for you. This is an exercise you can start implementing today. If you struggle with change, especially changing your perception of yourself, you can always hire a [business development coach](#). A coach can help you see your outlook on BD and guide you into changing your perception where it needs changing. A coach can call you out and give you specific areas to focus on in terms of what to tell yourself and how to approach prospective clients.

Change is not easy, but so often, it leads to better and greater outcomes. Now is the time to begin working on shifting your mindset and growing your business development efforts.

If you're looking for business development coaching or assistance, reach out to me, Rebecca Wenglinski, at rwenglinski@jaffepr.com.