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The Wisdom of Ambulance Chasers

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The Wisdom of Ambulance Chasers

If you can look past the outrageous and unethical behavior of the stereotypical “ambulance-chasing” attorney, you can — strange as it seems — actually find some kernels of wisdom that are useful to all attorneys and readily transferable to ethical marketing practices.

Like the ambulance chaser, you can ask yourself the following questions in anticipation of finding new clients:

Where will I go if I absolutely have to find a new client today? Most attorneys practice in one or two specific areas of the law. Often, they feel that having a specialty plus joining a firm or hanging out a shingle is sufficient to bring them clients. This is certainly a start but rarely sufficient. To develop a successful practice, attorneys must know the demographics of their clients, why they hire attorneys, and — most importantly — *when* they make the decision. Get out of your office, out of the courtroom, and out of bar association meetings. Identify the places where your clients are most likely to be, go there, and meet them. If you do this — and nothing more that’s suggested in this article — your business will increase, even if you do the other things poorly!

When I get there, how will I identify the person who is ready to buy my services today? The identifiable features of a true client — someone who actually decides to hire legal representation — will help you distinguish the potential client from the person who is merely curious about what a lawyer could do in a situation, someone who is thinking about hiring an attorney versus the person who is likely to waste your time.

What unique qualities do I have that will compel clients to hire me? Every lawyer has a distinct personality and set of values that are communicated to prospective clients. Which of the clients who need your specialized legal services are most likely to be attracted to you? And why? You must understand your *promise*, the intangible but real qualities that you deliver to clients that set you apart and make you outstanding!

What conversation will I have with potential clients that will inspire them to hire me? Upon meeting a potential client, an attorney must create a strong impression that results in the client feeling

positive about having had the opportunity to become acquainted. Even though it’s a new conversation, the person should clearly understand you, your services, and why it would be wise to engage you to resolve the situation currently being confronted.

How will I compel a prospective client to hire me today? Often, when a client finally decides to hire an attorney, the situation has been unaddressed and building momentum for some time. Most of the time, people only take decisive action under one of two circumstances: when a situation has gotten so bad that they must act now, or when an opportunity is so good that it’s clearly in their best interests to act now. Unfortunately, the first situation is the most common when it comes to hiring a professional. Emergency rooms aside, it’s not likely that attorneys can consistently arrange to be in the right place at the exact right time when disaster occurs. Therefore, it is incumbent that you discover ways to motivate the client to act immediately to prevent impending crises that, though predictable to a professional, may be unrecognized by the client.

When was the last time I listened to my clients in their places of need? This is the trait of most great rainmakers. It doesn’t consist of having the “right” sales pitch, the magic words, or the right price. It consists of identifying who is in the position of needing your services right now, meeting them, and showing interest in them and their circumstances by listening to them and their problems. Call it compassion, empathy, or understanding — They will see you as uniquely qualified to help them out of their present difficulties. This critical component of human relations is what each person wants and needs, yet is unlikely to ever ask for, especially when needed the most. Bring that to the people you service, and your practice will grow.

— Submitted by Dennis McCue, CMC, at the request of the Law Practice Management Section Executive Committee. McCue is a certified management consultant and principal of Dynamic Firm Management, dedicated to making law firms more successful. He will be speaking at the Law Practice Management Section’s February 22 meeting. He can be reached at (949) 640-2220 or www.dynamic-firm.com. The opinions expressed are his own.