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Business Development: Follow Up Tips and Techniques

by Marianne Trost

One of the most challenging aspects of business development is following up with contacts in a meaningful way that helps you maintain, grow, and expand your key business development relationships over time. Marketing wisdom estimates that it takes 6-12 meaningful “touch points” to advance a relationship from first introduction to a stage where a level of trust and rapport has been built that provides a foundation for a “buyer” to engage a “seller.” While there are exceptions to this rule, most relationships require consistent, persistent communication over an extended period. The following “touch point” techniques can be helpful as you look for ways to follow up with regularity:

Take Notes After You Meet Someone – Writing down a few words on the back of a business card or logging a few notes into your phone after meeting someone, will help prompt your memory later. These notes can help you remember your conversation, common interests, unusual facts, details or other information that you can tap into later to create the context for future follow up.

Send a Follow Up Email and Your VCard – After your first meeting, send a follow up email and personalize it with a sentence or two, so that the recipient can easily recall which of the many people they met was you. For example, “It was nice meeting you at the DRI Women in the Law event. I enjoyed our conversation about working with insurance adjustors,” will help prompt the recipient’s memory and show her that you remember the conversation. Attach your Vcard to the email so your new contact can easily download it into Outlook. Include your photo on the Vcard to help those who are visual remember you by sight.

Deliver on Any Commitments – If you offered to introduce your new contact to someone, or if you told your new contact you would send them an article you mentioned during your conversation, make certain you do so promptly. People will form their first impressions regarding your responsiveness and make assumptions about your working-style as an attorney based on how quickly you follow up and deliver on what you committed.

Invite to Connect on LinkedIn – Make a note on your calendar to invite your new contacts to connect with you on LinkedIn about 5 days after your Vcard follow up. The staggered pacing of sending the LinkedIn invitation will serve as another “touch point.” Personalize your invitation to connect by clicking on the contact’s bio and adding a sentence to your invitation that reminds the recipient of who you are, or where you met, or what you talked about. This will help reduce the risk of your contact not remembering who you are.

Reply to the LinkedIn Acceptance - When your contact accepts your LinkedIn invitation, click on your contact’s LinkedIn page and look for shared connections or commonalities that you can mention in a quick reply e.g. “Thank you for accepting my

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invitation to connect. I was looking at our connections and noticed that we both know so and so. What a small world! I met her at a DRI WITL dine around two years ago." Sharing things in common or having the same connections can quickly strengthen relationships and help build rapport.

Reach Out In Advance of the Next Event – Make a note on your calendar of the next time the event will occur at which you met your contact. Reach out to your contact in advance of that event, let them know you will be attending, ask them if they will be attending, and perhaps offer to meet ahead of time so you have a few minutes to catch up one-on-one.

Provide Something of Value – Be on the lookout for something of value that you can pass along to your contact. It could be an article on a topic of interest, a link to a blog post that is relevant to your contact's business, a link to a website that your contact would find interesting, a flyer about a CLE or trade association seminar, an e-Alert on an issue that your contact is encountering, or consider passing along a resource that would be appreciated. Make certain you share information that is relevant and of interest. Spread these types of "touch points" out over time so you have "reasons" to stay in touch every few months.

Do Something Thoughtful – As your relationships progress, you will come to know more about your contacts than just their job responsibilities, and you will be able to follow up in ways that show that you care. Most people appreciate it when others take the time to think of them in a genuine and authentic way, just as most of us know when we are being used or manipulated. When coming from a place of sincerity, consider sending a hand-written note of congratulations, or a card to express sympathy, or a small gift to celebrate a milestone, or pick up the phone and call your contact to ask how they are doing, or simply send an email and let your contact know you are thinking of them.

Ask Questions - If you don't know how to connect or follow up with your contact that is often a sign that you need to find an opportunity to learn more about them. Set up a Google Alert so you are notified if your contact is in the news. Go on your contact's website and media page to find out the latest trends or achievements. When speaking with your contact, ask a few open ended questions to learn more about what they do, why they like it, what challenges they encounter, or what opportunities lay ahead. If the conversation expands into non-business topics, take note of common interests and remember a few of the details. The more you learn about your contacts, the more possible avenues for follow up you will uncover, which will make future communication easier and more relevant.

Coordinate Your Activities - If you are traveling to another city, reach out in advance to contacts in that location whom you might be able to meet while there. Offer to stop by a contact's office and learn more about what they do. If you are attending a conference, ask your contacts in advance if they will be attending and coordinate meeting, sitting together, or doing a break-out session together. If you are putting together a panel, think about whether any of your contacts would be a good fit. If you are planning and activity, ask yourself whether any of your contacts would enjoy participating with you. Creating shared experiences often strengthens relationships and can take the place of multiple "touch points" as you grow your relationships.

Pace Yourself and Be Consistent Over Time - Keep in mind that no two people are the same and no two relationships are identical. Cultivate each relationship at its own pace and in its own way. In some instances your "touch points" will unfold quickly, in other instances your "touch points" will require the passage of many months and even years. Be patient and consistent, remembering that the key is to stay in touch over time so your relationships continue to grow. If you stick with it, you will succeed.

Marianne Trost *is the Women Lawyers Coach. She is a nationally recognized trainer, coach, internationally published author and speaker. Her mission is to provide women lawyers with practical tips, guidance, inspiration and support to grow their own books of business and create self-determination in their careers.* *www.thewomenlawyerscoach.com*

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