

ASKING FOR THE BUSINESS: A DIFFERENT VIEWPOINT

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One of the issues that arises most when working with women lawyers to grow their books of business is the difficulty associated with “asking for the business.”

“Asking” can often seem pushy, needy, salesperson-like, awkward, or uncomfortable. Studies have shown that women are significantly less likely than men to ask for what they want. (Source: Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever, *Women Don’t Ask: The High Cost of Avoiding Negotiation – and Positive Strategies for Change*, 2007). And yet, asking for the business is a critical component to building your own book. It is a skill that needs to be developed – because if you don’t ask for the business, someone else will.

For those who have difficulty in this area, one helpful approach is to view “asking” from a different perspective. Asking is less about what you want and more about what you can give to a potential client. Asking is a way to let a potential client know that you care enough to want their legal needs to be handled by a competent professional (you). Asking is a way to save a potential client the trouble of asking someone else for the name of a referral attorney. Asking is a way to spare your client the risk of surfing the Internet or responding to an ad in the hope of finding the right attorney. Asking is a way to let your potential client know that you want to help, should the need arise. Asking is a way to let your potential clients know that you are willing to serve as a resource, and that even if you don’t do the type of legal work they need, you are committed to putting them in touch with a reputable colleague who does.

To demonstrate the point, if you needed a doctor that specializes in an area that your primary physician does not, would you appreciate it if a specialist had told you at some point, “If you ever need a doctor who practices in my area, I would be happy to help you.”? Would you be offended if the doctor said to you, “If you ever have to switch doctors or need a second opinion, feel free to give me a call, I would be happy to help you.”? Would you be “put off” if the doctor said to you, “If you ever need a referral to a specialist, I would be happy to help you find a reputable one.”?

When it comes to professional services, most people (including your potential clients) appreciate a sincere offer of help. Legal services are no different. Most people need a lawyer at some point, and most people appreciate knowing whom they can call if they encounter a legal problem. You may not be the right fit for their legal need, but the odds are that you have a reputable colleague who is and you can make the referral.

So, the next time you hesitate to ask for the business, ask yourself whether you are actually keeping a potential client from an opportunity to use you as a resource, or whether you might be preventing them from comfortably contacting you first when a legal need suddenly arises. Depending on your perspective, “asking” can be less about what you want from a potential client and more about what you can give a potential client.

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