

## Business Development: Strategic Client Relationship Management

Featured in the September 2016 edition of the [Edge International Communiqué](#)

By Shirley Anne Fortina



Remember the old adage “The Client is King”? Put more baldly, the reason your business remains in existence is because you have clients. To lose sight of this carries the risk of losing clients. You know that the world you operate in is highly competitive and aggressive. You also know clients are (mostly) sophisticated buyers of legal services with high expectations and demands. The better you know your clients, the better the relationship – and therefore the less chance your clients will look elsewhere. It is well understood that it costs more to discover and develop new relationships than it does to look after existing ones. In addition, you do not need to have new clients to grow your business; you could quite possibly grow your share of their wallet by extending your service offering to your current clients through effective cross selling.

It is assumed that your firm has a clear plan and strategy which encompasses strategic client-relationship management, namely:

- You have a clear and well communicated Firm Strategic Plan, Business Plan and Operational Plans that are understood in all parts of your firm (HR, IT, Finance, Secretarial & Administration, Reception and all Legal Staff);
- The Strategic Plan includes: Vision, Values, Purpose, Mission, Key Success Factors, Key Strategic Objectives; Practice Objectives; Goals and Actions;
- You have identified your *Ideal Client*.

With this in mind there are many business development aspects to take into consideration when looking after existing clients. It is important that you align all business development activities to your firm’s overarching strategic plan – so the day-to-day activities feed into the business plan, which feeds into the strategic plan. If they do not, ask yourself this: What is the purpose of these business development activities?

Client relationship management should be your number one business development activity. How well you do it may have long term impacts on your relationships and therefore the success of your firm. Here are a few questions which will help you work out how well you know your clients and explore the type of relationship you want with them.

### In regard to your client:

- Do you know your client’s strategy?
- Do you know what significant business issues your client is facing?

### And what about you?

- Do you make it your business to understand what is special and unique about your client?

- Do you care about your client?
- Do you offer a clear explanation of what you are doing for them and why?
- Do you keep your client sufficiently informed on progress?
- Do you make sure that you are accessible and available when your client needs you?
- Do you keep your promises on deadlines and targets?
- Do you keep within your scope parameters?
- Do you make your clients feel like they are important to you?
- Do you make an attempt to be interested and helpful beyond the particulars of the tasks?
- Are you consistent in all your communications and interactions with your client?

**In regard to the relationship:**

- What type of relationship is it and how would you rank it out of 10 (1 low; 10 high)?
- What are you doing to maintain, build and / or enhance it?
- Who is / are the key contact points for the client? Do they like them? Do they know they can change their contact?
- What is your current position with your clients – panel appointment or transaction / commoditised / project based work?
- Where do you want to position your firm – preferred supplier, trusted advisor role?
- Have you completed a client plan and identified measurable goals?
- What is the total annual spend on your services by the client? What percentage do you get? Can you improve on this?
- Do you have the right people on your client service team?
- Who are your competitors and in what areas?
- Have you done any client listening lately? Health checks, debriefs, client conversations? Do you have a 12-month client listening plan? What regular relationship meetings do you have with the client?
- Getting closer to the client – Have you developed a relationship matrix: i.e., who are the people you need to know and service within the client's business?
- Do you have single or multiple relationships with key contacts – looking across the firm and the client?

**Conclusion**

The wonderful Dale Carnegie said, "You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you." The same goes for business relationships. Get interested in your clients – invest time, effort and energy into your relationships!