

OCTLA THE GAVEL

Using Personal Coaches for Business Development

by Kevin W. Brown, M.B.A.

One significant change in marketing strategies during the current economic downturn is the rise in the use of “personal coaching” services. So what is a personal coach? Why should you hire a personal coach? And if you want to hire a personal coach, what criteria should you use in selecting one?

WHAT IS A PERSONAL COACH?

Personal coaching for business development is aimed at helping the individual to be more successful in achieving his or her business development goals and objectives. A particular coach is usually hired because the client feels that the coach understands the issues at hand and can help meet the client’s specific needs.

Highly qualified personal coaches provide a broad range of services to their clients, including:

Business Development (BizDev) Strategic Guidance:

A personal coach can help you establish realistic goals, develop a specific plan of action, and prepare a timeline for executing a BizDev plan. The coach will then work with you through the process as the action plans are implemented, in order to measure success and make any necessary adjustments.

Prospecting and Sales:

Most attorneys do not have a background in professional sales.

Therefore, a coach can help provide invaluable guidance on such issues as: strategically targeting prospective clients; securing meetings; preparing presentations; and building effective referral relationships. In a nutshell, an effective personal coach teaches you how to bring in business.

Image Building:

In many cases it becomes apparent from working with a personal coach that your firm’s image is actually hurting your business development efforts. For example, your website may be very ineffective in portraying your firm’s unique traits and capabilities. Many coaches work with marketing firms, graphic designers and website developers. As such, a personal coach can bring these third parties in to upgrade your branding efforts, update your marketing materials and do whatever else is needed to present you and your firm in the best light.

Client Service Programs:

You should never overlook your current (and previous) client base when it comes to business development. Experienced personal coaches can teach you techniques for obtaining more business from existing clients, as well as assist in otherwise fostering client relationships.

WHY THE NEED FOR A PERSONAL COACH?

Once a tool used primarily by marketing-savvy firms, personal

coaching is now being used regularly by firms of all sizes and in all practice areas. So why is there an increase in the need for personal coaching?

Whether a senior partner, a new partner or an associate, many attorneys are now being asked to bring in business. For many firms this is a relatively recent phenomenon. Just a few years ago, many firms avoided asking more than just a few of their attorneys to get involved with BizDev. But with more time being freed up (due to less billable hour work), management at many firms has started to request and even require their attorneys to create new business opportunities. With layoffs still occurring, BizDev is a fundamental way to build revenues and keep jobs.

While the emphasis on personal BizDev has been a welcome change for some, others have objected. Many attorneys may be interested and some even inclined to develop new business, but virtually all attorneys have eventually found that they have a need for the basic tools to succeed in BizDev.

Fortunately, there is a lot that can be done to help individual attorneys, as well as entire firms, to be more successful in BizDev. These programs include marketing plans, training workshops, and branding and positioning programs to help an individual or a firm to maximize its marketing investment.

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WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A PERSONAL COACH

Once you have decided to seek the assistance of a personal coach, how do you choose the right one?

Highly-qualified personal coaches are able to help their clients with a wide range of BizDev techniques. This expertise requires that the coach have a diverse background so that he/she can effectively guide his/her clients to success. A well-rounded personal coach has a formal education in marketing, training in sales techniques, and a background in sales. A qualified personal coach will have a strong track record of providing these services to clients, and will be willing to provide you with a list of their clients as references.

In the competitive world of personal coaches, many only provide limited assistance. For example, some personal coaches focus solely on sales techniques, while having no experience with and providing no guidance for an overall marketing strategy. It is important to identify what your needs are and then to choose a qualified, experienced personal coach in the areas for which you or your firm has

identified needs.

As a final piece of advice, unless your internal marketing person has the appropriate credentials and training, do not add personal coaching to his or her job responsibilities. They will likely be ill-prepared for the challenge and probably unable to adequately provide the comprehensive services you require which will cause frustration for everyone involved, and detract them from competently performing the job they were originally hired to do.

IDENTIFYING YOUR PARTICULAR NEEDS

Every attorney has particular concerns that have caused the need for a BizDev coach. You may have little experience in developing new business -- or you may have done a lot but know that you aren't as productive as you could be. You may be frustrated with your ability to close deals.

You likely want your coach to have significant experience working with lawyers. The coach doesn't need to be a lawyer but he/she will be far more beneficial with an understanding of the attorney's specific practice areas and how these benefit potential clients. Otherwise, you'll waste time educating the coach and will be frustrated.

Since many attorneys have strong personalities, it is important for the

coach to be straightforward. A coach needs to be comfortable with providing positive or negative feedback as appropriate. Without proper guidance and corrective actions, the relationship is worthless.

In an increasingly competitive legal environment during tough economic times, it is important for every attorney and every law firm to assess their business and marketing plans to ensure they are maximizing their business opportunities. If, after assessing your needs and goals, a personal coach makes sense to implement a proper BizDev plan, choosing the right personal coach is as important a decision as whether or not to use a personal coach in the first place. However, with the right personal coach and the implementation of an effective program, any increase in business is likely to follow.

About the author:

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