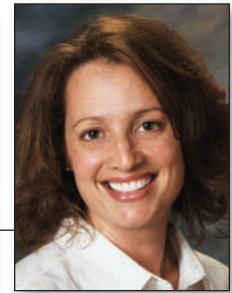


MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORS

Swinging for Proverbial Fences

By Steve Conley & Melissa Hoff



He Said

Ah, winter. Perfect for law-marketing and baseball. You know, before skirmishes about Cubs tickets start.

Baseball fans may recognize “setting the table” as something beyond a family ritual. For ballplayers, it means getting people on base and in position to score. It means favoring small advances, and playing for them, over big advances.

Often, it means getting more people home, albeit in less flashy or fashionable ways.

Despite their ongoing or resurgent application at some firms, it may be time to quit worrying about sales, marketing and business development roles. It’s time to stop trying to score business by sending a key batter to the (client dinner) plate. Instead, set the table by welcoming marketing, sales and “biz-dev” types and broader staff into conversations and run production efforts.

Sure, you can still build a sales force, even while wading through a debate about how a non-lawyer can help sell legal services. Certainly, you can continue branding the firm as the go-to shop for this case or that practice. And you probably should continue to squeeze in runs to key clients’ offices for interviews.

Just stop assuming a salesperson swinging for the fences will result in more wins.

The alternative? Expand who sets *and* sits at the table, lawyers and laymen alike, then see if you win as much or more business.

Scary proposition? No-brainer? Either way it’s about using your full team to garner and understand a little more information about clients—the law-firm equivalent of runners on base.

Invite your marketing staff and others to ask questions—internally, at seminars, during client interviews and during pitches. Skip myriad tweaks to customize a deal list in the 24 hours before a pitch. Stop tailoring the org chart.

Spend more minutes seeking to know one more thing about your client before a lunch meeting. Then, ask them about it.

Advance the conversation—and relationship—gradually, like many top sales-producers do.

And don’t worry about who’s at the plate asking what the (new client) count is, just invite them to step up and swing.

Steve Conley, marketing manager at Davis Graham & Stubbs LLP, can be reached at 303/892-7310 or Steve.Conley@dgsllaw.com.

She Said

The New Year typically brings with it a sense of renewed commitment for change: exercise regularly, eat right, stop procrastinating, or whatever the case may be. More often than not, we’ve had these commitments to change before. Recycled commitments, if you will.

In the law firm context, I find that many firms make an annual commitment to “breaking down silos” or “cross-selling with other offices” or “finding synergies with other practice groups.” After becoming sidetracked in previous years, we’ve resolved that in 2011 our goal will become a reality.

We might determine that one impediment to cross selling—and why didn’t we see this before?!—is that the lawyers simply don’t know or understand each other’s practices well enough to pitch those services to their clients. So we embark on a plan to educate the lawyers. We have baseball-style trading cards printed with each lawyer’s photo and core areas of practice.

Lawyers flip through or carefully read the trading cards, and then dutifully store or display them for easy reference. Except that no one references them. People rave about the success of an in-house tradeshow having learned about the practices of their fellow partners, but without a clear vision of how these partners might plug into their own clients.

Too often, we set out intending to tackle large projects without understanding why we haven’t been successful before. I recently read an article about making change happen. It talked about how general goals such as, “take care of tax issues” languish on a to-do list for weeks if not months, while “call the accountant” gets done that day.

I certainly see applicability in the law firm context. How often do nebulous goals like “become the preeminent law firm on the West Coast” make it onto the strategic plan without a lot of thought about specifically what that would mean? What is the equivalent step of “call the accountant” so that we can break the goal into manageable pieces?

Change is hard. Let’s make this the year that we choose to stare down the real impediments to success, and develop a methodical, step-by-step plan for addressing those hurdles. My first step is already done. And on a personal note, I’ve got a call into my accountant. ■

Melissa Hoff, 425/822-5262, melissa@mbhstrategies.com