

## Business development beyond the bounds

By Linda Julian

When all is said and done, marketing programmes, profile-raising, and collateral only go so far.

Successful business development is largely about attitudes, behaviours, habits and rituals, together with a few well-conceived and effectively-executed activities.

By embracing business development practices and techniques which go well beyond the bounds of "normal" or ordinary, you can bring about extraordinary results.

Here are just a few "beyond the bounds" ideas.

### Client-centric communication

Whether proposing, presenting, or simply persuading a prospective client to entrust you with their work, you will create a much more compelling argument if you make it "client-centric" rather than "your firm-centric".

### Client as subject

Rather than boasting about what you do, or talking about your firm, frame your message with the client as the subject.

Don't write in terms of "we have twenty lawyers...". Instead, the more effective approach is "you, client x, will have access to a team of twenty experienced lawyers, each of whom knows your industry".

Instead of saying "our legal team will be headed by Kim Smith" it's better put as "client x legal team will be led by Kim Smith" or "your legal service team will be led by...".

### Imbue your pitch with benefits

Better than simply claiming "we have great expertise", frame it as "you will benefit from our expertise in these ways...".

### Show commitment and promise

Rather than the general claim that "we keep up-to-date with all developments", it's far more persuasive to say "you, client x, can depend upon us to keep fully up-to-date with all developments in your field".

This "client-centric" approach is far more persuasive, will have greater impact, and is much more likely to succeed.

### Camp out with clients

Wherever possible and feasible, spend time "camping out" in the offices and facilities of business clients.

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## Business development beyond the bounds

Any natural scientist will tell you that to understand an organism you need to observe it in its habitat. One great example: a giraffe, seen in the zoo, is amazing - tall, magnificent, exotic, even weird. Watching a giraffe out on the African savannah, you see an animal that is no longer weird - it reaches food sources way out of range of competitors and is, so obviously, perfectly adapted to its habitat.

Natural science offers valuable lessons. There are strong parallels between the giraffe anecdote and lawyers experience of clients.

In the rarefied atmosphere of your office, various client attributes or actions will seem unbelievable or inexplicable. Observing that same client on their own territory may put things into context. Better, you'll learn lots to help you tailor advice to their business circumstances. Still better, you'll show you care. You'll demolish barriers. Best of all, you'll improve your prospects of coming away with another matter.

"Camping out" with clients extends to working side-by-side as they deal with their customers, suppliers, and business challenges.

This isn't a magical panacea: it doesn't replace calm, cool-headed, objective analysis and expert counsel. Just because you develop insight into the forces at play in your client's world doesn't mean you can instantly solve their every problem, let alone save them from themselves.

But the camping out experience should ratchet up - by quite a few notches - your influence, persuasion, and value.

### Cohabit with your client

Cohabiting - temporarily "living with" - your client, to work on a project, turns conventional logic on its head.

It can pay huge dividends to forsake your comfortable, convenient habit of holing up in your own offices - especially for intense, pressured, time-critical projects. There's no easier way to get client input to a critical project than to cohabit with them.

The best service solutions to complex problems are rarely developed by a single professional operating in isolation.

Better thought of as a duet, rather than a solo performance.

Your client needs to be part of any complex project - seamlessly, from the beginning, right to the end.

By cohabitating through a project, you'll draw your client into an intense problem-solving frame. You'll create powerful intimacy. You'll learn, teach and demonstrate just how much knowledge, expertise, resource and time you're contributing. You'll get close to information resources. You'll be able to moderate any wild demands.

Best of all, you'll be able to craft and co-produce a cohesive solution robust enough to last long after you've moved out.

A few cohabitation guidelines:

- check top-level, quality client personnel commit to availability
- live for your client while you cohabit - you don't have to be there 100% of the time, but you mustn't just move your other work onto their premises
- actively transfer knowledge and skills
- leverage every opportunity to increase intimacy and co-identification
- don't just survive it, enjoy it !

### About the author

Linda Julian is acknowledged as a leading authority on strategic practice development and how to win business for law firms. Since 1979, she has consulted with lawyers and other professionals throughout Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific, and Asia on a wide range of business acquisition, client retention, and strategic management issues.

Her book *The Passionate Professional: creating value, success, and prosperity* has sold in 13 countries and has received wide acclaim. Linda lectures in strategic management and marketing professional services at post-graduate level. She leads the small and highly specialised Julian Midwinter & Associates consulting practice.