

Take control of practice development

Linda Julian

Many a lawyer is deeply delusional. They say "I'm in control of my practice", mistaking balance sheet ownership with control.

In truth, you're not really in control of your practice, your business, or your life until you're ready with - and adept with - attitudes, behaviours, and techniques which mean that you exercise choices in the direction and development of your practice.

Taking control of your practice is about making choices. Take an existential perspective on relationships with clients and interactions with prospective clients, and you'll soon open the way to a better professional future.

Going with the flow may appeal - often much easier in the short-term - but nothing like the satisfaction and long-term pay-off of making choices, taking action, and accepting the consequences.

Is this a client I really want ?

Every so often, take stock of your client base and work out whether it's still right for you and your firm.

Evaluate clients against these criteria:

- Is this a good strategic fit for my practice ?
- Is this a profitable relationship ?
- Is this a client going somewhere - that is, on the ascendancy ?
- Does this client help me and my firm to use and develop skills which will be appealing to other desirable clients ?

- Is this a client which I can grow through further services ?
- Is this client a good commercial proposition ?
- Do they pay well, on time, and absorb only reasonable amounts of resource for the fee return ?
- Does this client introduce me to new opportunities and refer work ?
- Do I like working for this client ?
- Am I doing a really good job for them, and getting good outcomes for them, and am I truly valuable to them ?
- Is this a satisfied client ?

If you can say "yes" to several of these, then this is a client you want.

More than a couple of "no's" and it is probably a client you don't want.

Waving polite goodbyes

Often, we spend so much time at winning work that we don't take time to think about whether we have clients who should be waved a "polite goodbye".

www.julianmidwinter.com.au

Tel +61 2 9968 4168
Fax +61 2 9960 4480

Suite 16 357 Military Road
Mosman NSW 2088
Australia

Email julianmidwinter@julianmidwinter.com.au

ACN 002 118 818

It may be time to farewell a client if:

- they persistently haggle over bills, are delinquent payers, or don't pay at all
- their work is really not your "cup of tea" - either in an area not of interest to you, or unlikely to be profitable, or excessively risky
- conflicts of interest preclude you from acting for others who would be better fit
- they don't fit your culture, size, geography, and service delivery system
- the client is likely to be connected with lots of bad situations and adverse publicity which may indirectly attach to you
- they aren't happy with your work, and whatever you do you can't please them.

By weeding out your clients and selectively referring them elsewhere, you will be able to grow a more impressive client base.

And, maybe by referring them elsewhere you will eliminate a problem from your life, and give another professional who may be more an appropriate source of service a reason to do you favours in the future !

Smart goals

Planning business development shouldn't merely be a long list of activities - rather, effective planning must be based around clear goals.

Goals are important parts of doing well - and striving to do even better - in just about every aspect of life, including developing your professional practice.

Get smart about business development goal setting with the help of this succinct distillation from a plethora of academic research, supported by lots of practical experience.

Goals should be **realistically attainable**. An over-ambitious goal won't help much.

The right level to set a goal is where you **stretch beyond what's normal and comfortable at your current level** of achievement.

Research confirms that **goals tend to be self-limiting**. If you want improved performance, you must stretch. The unintended consequence of an insufficiently challenging goal may be performance or achievement some way short of what might otherwise have happened.

A goal which you see as **attainable, but challenging, is most likely to positively impact your performance**. Set goals accordingly.

If an objective is necessary and important, but simply so far away that it seems too hard to reach - or impossible - try working out an achievable interim goal, as the first step on a path to your ultimate objective. Same goes for goals which will take quite some time to realise: identify milestones along the way to help you track progress.

Don't juggle too many goals at once.

Around **five to seven clear goals** is sufficient for most of us at any time. Focus on these targets, achieve these goals, then set a limited number of new objectives and work towards them.

Getting smart about goal setting - whether goals for yourself, or goals for your team - will help you produce your best results, and take control of your practice development.

About the author: *Linda M. Julian is a director of Julian Midwinter & Associates, strategic practice development consultants to the legal profession. Nearly three decades experience working with legal practices throughout Australia, Asia, and the Pacific, place her in a unique position to advise on strategic management and practical business development issues. Her down-to-earth, pragmatic approach to the critical business issues facing the profession, combined with creative ideas and pragmatic advice, make her a popular conference speaker, regular contributor to professional journals, and an in-demand consultant and advisor*