

Selling – it’s not a dirty word!

Have you been here?

Lawyer: “I am interested in buying a car.....”

Salesperson: “Got just the deal for you – it truly is your lucky day. Just look at this beauty, 0 to 60 in 6 seconds flat, limited to 155 mph voluntarily but he we can get round that, if you know what I mean. Leather seats and the clincher – a 6 speaker stereo system with 2 additional sub woofers in the front doors. Do the deal today and I’ll throw in a spoiler. Do you want it in blue or red?”

Lawyer: “Er...it’s for my elderly mother”

Perhaps this is an extreme example. Lawyers would never cut off a prospective client mid sentence and rush in with the wrong offer to the right client ... or would they?

Do you know anyone who has been here?

Client: “We are looking for some legal advice for our directors”

Lawyer: “Well we have five offices in three countries and about 72 partners...er maybe 75 by now. We deliver a full global service. We can do corporate deals, commercial, employment, real estate, media, transport, cross-jurisdictional mergers is a speciality in our corporate department. We always add value by giving you seminars and good client socials...”

Client: “Er... Do you do tax planning?”

Lawyer: “Er...maybe...”

Sound familiar? If so you are not alone. All too many lawyers tend to go into ‘sales patter’ simply because they feel uncomfortable. They deliver a menu, hoping that something will get the person’s interest. The usual result is a confused and turned off potential client.

Think about the last time you were at a BD client meeting

Did you check who the real client is?

Did you question to discover the client’s real needs and fears? Did you ask their ideal outcome?

On discovering these did you walk through the solution and ask what they would be able to achieve with it?

Did you check if this would be the ideal solution?

Did you ask who else in the organisation would be affected by your advice?

Most importantly did you ask if this was the priority issue for the client?

Is this an exhaustive list of questions? – not at all. How do you know when you have asked all the right questions? If the client is still sitting there answering your questions you are probably asking the right ones. If they have glazed over you are heading rapidly for the exit.

If you have asked all the right questions and the client looks distracted then you have talked your way into a sale but now you are doing your best to question your way out of it.

These questions seem common sense and yet they are the least used questions in legal sales. Why? Because they require lawyers to step out of their comfort zone.

There is a huge difference between giving legal advice and selling legal advice. Giving advice means telling and instructing from a position of knowledge. Selling requires active listening, questioning, business knowledge, commercial thinking and - maybe the most uncomfortable - thinking on one's feet from a position of ambiguity.

So can lawyers learn to sell and grow their business?

Absolutely, but it takes practice, planning and (at first) courage. Try the following steps to avoid being Mr Menu:

1. **Prepare.** 20 minutes internet research (which you can delegate to a trainee) will give you sufficient information to sound and feel well informed in front of the client. If you are faced with a 'cold call' from a potential client simply ask them to tell you more about their business or situation before you get into any detail. They will tell you what you need to know.
2. **Listen.** Make notes to force yourself to listen and underline the things you want to question.
3. **Question.** Tell the 'client' you have some questions in order to get the full picture – and then ask them!
4. **Identify outcome.** Ask the 'client' what their ideal outcome would be and what worries them most. You will give the impression of being on the client's side.
5. **Link.** Tell the client what you can do and link this directly to their issue. Do not list every service. The 'client' does not care! Where possible give illustrations of how you have helped other similar clients with similar issues.
6. **Close.** This is the step which needs most courage. Ask if the solution sounds right for them. If they say no – ask more questions. If they say yes – move straight to getting an instruction. Very important here – if the client asks about fees face the question directly. Fudging here will lose you 'the sale'; trying to soften the reality will lose you their trust in the long term.

The steps sound easy but the application is much harder. If it was easy – every lawyer would be developing their business without a care. However, with practice and application we believe the majority of lawyers can learn to impress though intelligent commercial questions, assured presentation of relevant solutions, empathy with issues and assuredness in the face of fees. It just takes a little confidence and a lot of practice.

If you would like to know more about deWinton-Williams' Business Development training and consulting services, please call Michael Farrell on 0207 372 4997 or look at our courses on www.dewinton-williams.com