**How Committed Are You?**

*By Kimberly Alford Rice*



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Since the economic downturn hit several years back and legal positions have been much harder to come by, there have been unprecedented numbers of lawyers making alternative career choices. One of those choices is to hang out your own shingle.

Admirable choice, but not one without major commitment challenges. There are three specific business areas that without commitment, you will likely face other tough choices.

**Commitment to your business’s success.** Have you closed the door on other career choices? Do you have a backup plan if your business does not prosper?  It is fine to have a Plan B to feel more assured as long as you recognize it as such and don’t bolt at the first sign that “this is going to take longer than I originally thought”.

Sure, starting a business (any business) is a journey and can challenge us in unanticipated ways, but if you truly envision running your own firm and go into it with realistic expectations, Plan B will be a distant memory before you know it.

**Commitment to growing your business.** This is a biggie. To realize positive results, you must be consistent in your business development efforts.

Do you approach growing your business in a scattershot or haphazard manner, or do you routinely engage in high impact business development activities? Do you understand what it truly requires? This separates the girls from the women in that to steadily grow your business, you must engage in expanding your network, effectively communicate your value proposition, and deliver extraordinary client service each and every day. To most effectively accomplish these objectives, you must have and execute a well-crafted marketing plan. Do you have one? Otherwise, you are just engaging in random acts of marketing to no great result.

With so many demands and limitations on your time, it is imperative to have written marketing plan to capture your scheduled activities, those that you commit to daily, weekly, monthly, and so on. Without a written list of tactics, your good intentions will be lost when unanticipated assignments and other extenuating circumstances arise.

When I work with clients on structuring their business development initiatives, I often advise them on how to develop a “marketing mindset” by incorporating small, incremental marketing activities into their daily schedule. As they develop this discipline, my clients are often amazed at how much they have accomplished in cultivating and strengthening key relationships, and how they have broadened their networks and client retentions without any great interruption to their practice. The key here is the importance of taking control of your business development planning versus allowing circumstances to dictate your activities.

**Commitment to existing clients.** Lawyers are well advised to recognize the business potential of expanding relationships (and work) from existing clients while also focusing on developing new business from new clients. We’ve all heard the ratio that 80% of our work originates from 20% of our clients. It’s much easier to deliver extraordinary service to your current clients to prove your value than to start fresh with new, untested clients. It’s a balance much like so many other endeavors.

One element, however, bears highlighting and that is what exactly it means to deliver “extraordinary” service. We all know it when we see it as consumers. Simply turn that feeling on its head when you engage with your clients: return phone calls in record time; respond to emails on a Sunday afternoon once in a while; offer a little more research than was requested (and not bill for it). Truly let the client know how much his/her business means to you. Before long, you’ll be handed new files.