



Finding Meaning in Finding Clients

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The search for meaning has perplexed philosophers, Monty Python and victims of midlife crises.

It's also an issue for law firms. The high level of dissatisfaction among attorneys is a leading indicator that something's amiss for many practitioners of the profession.

While the search for meaning seems a personal quest, there are things law marketing professionals can do to help their attorneys discover the answer.

Meaning Matters

First things first – why bother?

With all that marketing departments must do, this apparently soft item is not an obvious chart topper. Or said more bluntly - meaning, schmeaning, why not just take the money and run?

Quite simply, "It's dangerous not to do what you love. The harsh truth is that if you don't love what you're doing, you'll lose to someone who does." according to Craig A. Brown. This quote, from the bestseller "Success Built to Last," was part of Brown's program "Finding Mean in Finding Clients" presented to the Los Angeles Chapter of the Legal Marketing Association.

Brown, a business development consultant with the [David Freeman Consulting Group](#), elevated the discussion from California warm and fuzzy to a compelling business case for finding meaning in work and business development.

Meaning at Work

Sometimes finding meaning in an activity is effortless. But in the workplace, it's easy to veer from lofty goals and get mired in the grind.

Legal marketing author David Maister discovered that professionals only liked about 30 percent of their work. So that other 70 percent, those hours filled with dislike, makes for a very long and unproductive day.

There are a few formal steps to redress the imbalance and bring more meaning into the office. Brown offered a framework for assessment, big-picture thinking and action.

Strengths

Do you know what energizes you? What activity keeps you so engrossed that you look up and realize three hours have passed by without you noticing? That's your strength. And your practice – and the attorney's – should play to it.

Asking an attorney seemingly basic questions, such as what kind of clients they like, what part of being a lawyer they enjoy, can reveal surprising answers.

Whatever answers and strengths come to the surface - research, writing, speaking with people - figure out how to do more if it and build it into the practice.

Formal testing using an array of assessment tools, such as [Myers Briggs](#) and [Caliper](#), can also help start the process. Identifying various personality characteristics are also useful in pointing business development in compatible directions.

Service

Brown strongly believes that our natural inclination is to serve and help people. The good thing about service is the win-win aspect. The provider feels great about being genuinely useful and the recipient enjoys the support and guidance.

In the law firm framework, he suggests attorneys can develop deeper meaning by asking themselves how they can "serve clients in a way that builds trust." Within a professional atmosphere of trust, many growth opportunities become available, including the highly valued cross-selling of services to firm clients.

Friendship

Consider the true tale of the new lateral attorney. For the first three months after joining the firm, he was not asked to lunch. Not once. By anybody. Bring back images of sitting alone in the school cafeteria?

In a testament to that attorney, he made a move and started asking people to lunch himself. By sharing the story, Brown underscored how valuable friendships are at work.

While many people advocate keeping a healthy boundary between work and personal lives, 30 percent of people report that they have a best friend at work. Having a pal at work makes people more effective, happier to be there and builds trust. And with trust, much new business can develop.

An easy action item for marketers is to make a friend match. If there are two attorneys who seem isolated or in need of a companion, consider arranging a lunch for the pair. It might be the start of a friendship that's valuable for all.

Vision

Participating in something bigger is one of those motivating forces that we are not always aware of but something that compels us daily. Says Brown, "If people get up in the morning simply to make money, that's okay - the big vision for them is to make money to take care of the people they care for, or to do something they love." Knowing the global view helps propel us through the bad days and gives us meaning.

While these questions might feel more driven by emotion than economics, think again. A firm's culture consistently outranks money as the reason attorneys jump ship to a competitor. This reality was confirmed by program attendee, legal recruiter Joel Mendelsohn of Legal Option Group in LA. He explains that firms with cultures that are receptive to, and remember, these work-life issues are ultimately more meaningful and attractive workplaces.