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Tools for Developing Business Through Public Speaking

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TOOLS FOR DEVELOPING BUSINESS THROUGH PUBLIC SPEAKING

By Cynthia Sharp, The Sharper Lawyer

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“Speech is power: speech is to persuade, to convert, to compel.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Many attorneys (including me) have built successful practices by writing and speaking extensively in their areas of expertise. After all, people are more apt to do business with professionals they know, like and trust. Showcasing intellectual capital through a robust writing and public speaking initiative will help any lawyer build a profitable and sustainable law practice.

Developing strong presentation skills is only the beginning. Creating and implementing a sound strategy to maximize the possibility of creating a relationship with potential clients and referral sources is a key component. All of the following suggestions can be implemented immediately by any lawyer looking for a long-term practice building solution.

Submit Proposals

Some attorneys are asked to speak because they are “known” in the field. Perhaps they have written on the topic (highly recommended), or a member of the program planning committee has vetted him or her as an expert through personal experience.

A proactive approach is to identify groups (including bar associations) that you wish to address and submit speaking proposals on a periodic basis. A sample proposal form for CLE presentations will be forwarded upon request. Please email me at cindy@thesharperlady.com.

Action Steps: Identify five organizations whose members would benefit from your message. Draft and submit proposals to appropriate staff and volunteers at these selected organizations.

Distribute Pre-Session Surveys

Circulating a short survey to members of the future audience will greatly assist you with your customization efforts. Most program planners that I've worked with have been happy to circulate the survey to registrants once I explain how the answers will be used.

Since the presentation is for the audience's benefit, why not find out what they want to learn and craft your message on that basis? Surveys I have distributed elicit responses from 10–25% of the prospective audience. As part of the presentation, I create a slide with the question and sample answers that we discuss during the course of the program.

Sample survey question: "What do you need to learn at this session in order to make it worth the investment of your time and money?"

Day of Session

Keeping in mind that your objective is to create and deepen relationships with audience members, budget your time so that you can arrive early and leave late. All too often, overworked lawyers screech into the venue with few moments to spare and jet out of the room as soon as they are finished speaking.

My personal rule of thumb is to arrive one hour early and to leave after the last audience member bids farewell. Arriving early allows me to become comfortable with the room and to ensure that it is set up to my specification. For example, if a loose electrical cord is on the platform, I will ask the technical staff to please secure it with duct tape to prevent me from tripping during the presentation.

Some of the audience will arrive surprisingly early. After becoming comfortable with the environment, I “warm up” the room by chatting with early arrivers, finding out about their practice areas and why they chose to attend.

Sample Platform Strategy: As interactive presentations have great impact, I engage attendees frequently. Since I make it a practice of remembering a few names, I can engage as follows:

“Tina and I were chatting before we began today’s session and she related a unique way that her firm delivers the settlement check to her personal injury clients. Tina, do you mind telling everyone about your process?” Naturally, I would have her permission before beginning this line of conversation. After she tells her story, I then ask if other attendees have something to share and many will jump on the bandwagon since another person “went first.”

Design Evaluation Sheets

At the end of your presentation, distribute an evaluation form to be completed on the spot. While ratings such as “excellent” and “met expectations” can be informative, deeper knowledge can be elicited by asking these questions:

- What was the most useful part of the presentation?
- What part could have been eliminated or de-emphasized?
- What will you do differently or what action will you take as a result of today’s session?
- Do you know of other groups that could benefit from the information delivered today?

In order to inspire more people to participate meaningfully in the evaluation, explain that you read every comment and take them seriously. Also, including a slide in the slide deck that asks for evaluations can reinforce your request.

Post-Session Actions

Be sure to send thank you notes to the program planner and staff who were helpful. A handwritten note is preferable as it is memorable.

Review the evaluation sheets carefully as the comments will provide a basis for improving your presentation so that it will be even more effective the next time. The names and contact information captured on the evaluation form should be immediately entered into your client relationship management system. A quick follow up after the session is a step toward building a relationship with the audience member whether as a client or referral source. Perhaps you will send your most recent newsletter or even reach out by phone. Consistent and persistent contact with many people will help you build profitable relationships with some of them.

Thought leadership marketing (which requires an investment of sweat equity) may not produce immediate results. But the outcome of a strategic initiative that is carefully implemented will be a strong and sustainable practice.

Most importantly, lawyers who write and speak usually become even better at their craft. According to Roman philosopher Seneca, “While we teach, we learn.”

Cynthia Sharp

Business development leader and veteran attorney Cynthia Sharp, Esq., works with motivated lawyers seeking to generate additional revenue for their law firms. The business development strategies and skill sets that she shares were developed and tested over a period of 30 years in practice and are constantly refined to reflect modern marketing techniques. For additional information about business development issues, check out thesharperlady.com.