

Getting the most out of business development training and planning



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Rachael Wheatley offers advice on how to maintain momentum on BD activity.

It's hard making sure that your business development activity levels keep up. With the best will in the world, that great workshop you've attended and the focused plan you've spent time on and discussed and agreed with colleagues can so easily get forgotten, or part-actioned. Even though you completely agree that consistent inputs are more likely to produce consistent outputs (opportunities and fees) and avoid those 'peaks and troughs', juggling work and business development can be hard.

But, if you don't follow through on the workshops and planning, you won't get the most value from them. More importantly, you will find it harder to grow the business.

Firstly – a challenge: are you really too busy or... have you not made it a priority or still don't feel comfortable about BD? We will make time for those things we are motivated to do and enjoy doing – and business development for professionals can fall into neither! Consider, honestly, what it really is that is stopping you keeping going with the plan; what you do then and how you change depends on what the problem is.

Secondly – our experience is that it often needs the support of others to help professionals keep up momentum with their BD activity, so that something happens every week and every month. That might be:

- The business development and marketing team working closely with professionals to help them, coach them, support them, facilitate meetings, arrange meetings, cajole. This does not mean they do everything – there are still actions that only the professionals can do.
- HR professionals, the managing partner or team leaders to look at how anything at organisational level might help, for example building BD objectives into appraisals.
- Finance director to see whether management information could report on other factors, not just revenue or meeting financial targets, for example inputs such

as how many meetings have been generated, how many articles have been written, how much work is referred to other teams. And, perhaps those targets should be at a team level and not an individual level – the latter usually makes it more likely the professionals hang on to work and don't consider the opportunities for others.

And finally, here are some ideas that anyone in the firm could consider to help make the most of the planning, keep momentum up and make sure you follow through:

- Don't be too ambitious – progressing a few prospects and relationships with clients is better than overloading yourself and not doing anything. Bite-sized-chunks.
- 'Buddy' with another person, put regular BD meetings in your diaries and keep each other to account.
- Put BD as a discussion item on your team agenda every time you meet; put it first so it doesn't get left off if you feel you don't have time.
- Tell the board or management team that you are going to talk about your/your team's BD plan and activities to them at their next meeting – I guarantee you won't turn up without having done anything!
- Plan which key client you are going to meet with in each of the next four months, call them and arrange a meeting.
- If you manage a team, make sure that everyone in the team is making some contribution to BD and marketing – and it's easier to work in a team than on your own.
- If you're a team member, think of three activities you'd like to do every month that will best help the firm to grow, put them in your diary, block out the time if needed and do them!
- Share your activities via an internal blog – what's happened, what people are doing and going to do, share successes – and make that a regular thing; once a month is fine.
- Set yourself targets – number of meetings with prospects, number of meeting with clients, number of seminars given to prospects, etc and talk through with someone how to achieve them.
- Offer to coach and mentor someone in your team and set up regular meetings. Ask someone to do the same for you.

Something I have seen time and again is that the workshops are only the start of the journey and that it is the implementation of the learning that is the real key, and probably the hardest circle to square.

What I have also seen is that firms who think of ways in which they can set things up so that there is support for following through on plans will be more successful. It is that combination of learning and applying that is the key.

Rachael Wheatley is an experienced business development and marketing professional and has worked in-house for a number of organisations prior to joining The PACE Partners four years ago, including the last 15 years within the professional and business services sector. She has been involved at a senior level devising and implementing business and marketing strategies and plans, key client management programmes and CRM systems, as well as advising on external communications, brand development, tenders and marketing research and, in the last few years, delivering workshops and coaching for PACE. Visit www.thepacepartners.com.