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Getting some wind behind your sales

Boost conversion rates by understanding what clients need

By Grant Cameron

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To survive, lawyers must have the skills and smarts and be technically good at their jobs. In today's ultra-competitive environment, though, they must also be adept at hooking clients.

There's nothing more disheartening, after all, than doing an initial consult, only to see a prospective client walk out and go to another firm.

So what's the secret to ensuring an initial consult turns into a prospective client?

Brian Galbraith, founder of Galbraith Family Law, boosted his conversion rate by enlisting the services of a sales coach.

While sales coaches are commonplace in the corporate world, they're not called on often by law firms.

"Clients were coming into our office and they had a need. And we have a service that could meet their need. But our lawyers weren't conveying that to them," says Galbraith. "The sales coach helped our lawyers understand what the needs of our clients were so they could come up with a plan on how to meet those needs with the services provided by the firm."

Galbraith hired Rich Grof, a sales coach from Barrie, Ont. who helps business leaders and professionals improve their conversion rates.

At the time, lawyers at Galbraith's firm were opening files for approximately 20 per cent of initial consultations. The rate has improved dramatically, with more than 50 per cent now becoming clients.

"More of the initial consultations are turning into clients who are paying full fees," says Galbraith. "From my perspective as the firm owner, it's advantageous to try to increase that conversion rate."

The sales coach worked with the firm's 10 associates and taught them how to build rapport and listen to what clients are saying so they could ask questions and mine deeper to find out what the client really wants. They also learned to pay more attention to the client's body language and improve their own communication skills by using language that clients understand.

"It wasn't so much selling as in understanding their needs so that we could talk about how we could meet those needs," says Galbraith.

Mock consultations were also set up and taped. Afterwards, lawyers were given pointers on how to improve their closing skills.

"They learned a lot from that process of being able to see themselves during an initial consultation and getting feedback on things that they could have done differently and more effectively," says Galbraith.

Sales coach Grof, who's been working with business leaders for 25 years, says lawyers are knowledgeable people but they often have virtually no experience when it comes to sales.

"The skills that they use in the courtroom to interrogate are actually counter to what it would be for sales," he says. "Very frequently, when they're sitting there with a client, they start to interrogate, they're driving down questions, so it's actually counterintuitive to sales."

"A lawyer will often say, 'What do you want to buy?' and, 'How often do you want to buy it?' and 'What do you need it for?' They'd be coming at you like that."

To close the deal, Grof says lawyers must learn how to listen to a client so they can understand what the client needs, and then come up with a plan to best help the client.

"Lawyers like to solve problems quickly. We teach them to listen on different levels, how to keep asking the questions and how that will lead them to discovering the overall core concern."

During an initial consultation, the challenge for a lawyer is to tease out what a client really wants, then convey in simple language how the lawyer can help, says Grof.

"What needs to happen is that the client needs to get the feeling that the lawyer knows how to do it, that



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they can trust the lawyer, and that they can work with the lawyer.”

If a lawyer proposes a solution too quickly, and without the client fully understanding how it can work, a disconnect can occur, says Grof, and that’s when the lawyer loses the client.

“The client walks away stunned, confused, feeling stupid.”

Vocabulary and language used by a lawyer are important factors in the initial consultation, Grof says.

“Lawyers are like technicians,” he says. “But technicians and lawyers talk their own language. The key is bringing it to the level that the client can understand.”

Many lawyers also make the mistake of dumping too much information on a client, says Grof.

“It’s way too overwhelming. The client’s stunned at that point and they have information overload and walk out dazed like they’ve been banged on the head.

“They’re not going to go back to where they feel stupid. They’re going to pick another lawyer nine times out of 10.”

Often, lawyers also fail to act immediately when a client expresses an interest in signing on, says Grof.

“The lawyer will say, ‘Call me if you need me,’ so when the client’s ready to get started they don’t ask the client to get started.”

Gary Mitchell, a business coach in Vancouver who specializes in the legal industry, says enlisting the help of a sales coach is a “brilliant idea” for law firms because the individual will teach lawyers how to listen during an initial consultation, something that can help them seal the deal.

During an initial consult, he says, lawyers need to concentrate on building rapport and show compassion for the client’s issues and the best way to do that is to listen to what they really want.

“Everyone has their own style but there’s certain language that you can use that will help move the prospect along. It’s about language, and body language, and the questions you ask.”

Going to see a lawyer is usually not a pleasant experience for most clients, he says, because they may be facing litigation or are in a bad place.

“Often, they’re highly emotional, and it could be anything from fear to anger and resentment, as they’re going through a lot of emotions.”

Mitchell says partners often spend a lot of money on marketing, websites, and social media, and on trying to get clients to come through the door, but many don’t work on how lawyers can close the deal.

“You’re spending a significant amount of time and money to get them to come in the door so it only makes sense that you’ll do whatever you can to improve that close ratio.”

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