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MARKETING TRAINING FROM THE GROUND UP

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Some people believe that attorneys are poor marketers and that marketing training has limited impact. In my experience consulting on practice development issues with attorneys, that has indeed been the case in some instances. Often attorneys are able to learn marketing concepts, but the training they have received comes under the heading, "too little, too late."

In the corporate sales and marketing world where I worked for many years, individuals who chose sales as a career were trained extensively and given client responsibility gradually. In many cases, new marketers have as much as six months to a year of intensive group and one-on-one training and support before production expectations are placed upon them. Even beyond that initial training period, there is a rigorous schedule of on-going training that continues throughout the individual's career. Having trained and managed many successful marketers, I know how instrumental training was in instilling confidence and building the basic set of skills needed for successful marketing.

In contrast, traditional legal services marketing training is designed for the senior attorney, primarily partners. Many trainers focus on client service and communication issues, networking at the highest levels, and pursuing key leadership roles. Associates or junior attorneys who have no clients and are not likely to for many years are often discouraged by these strategies because they have no hope of applying them in the near-term. Even senior attorneys are somewhat daunted by this type of training precisely because they have not been exposed to marketing concepts in gradual stages.

Most marketing training for attorneys seems to focus primarily on the most sophisticated approaches and may be offered to attorneys too late in their careers. Junior attorneys are for the most part ignored or invited to sit in on sessions bound to frustrate them because the workshops promote activities inappropriate for associates' purposes.

All attorneys, but especially junior attorneys, can benefit from a steady diet of basic skills-building training designed to assist them in developing an active marketing strategy from the earliest stages of their careers. Strengthening communication skills, guidance on building an effective professional network, goal-setting for professional growth, enhancing visibility, and assistance in charting paths toward organizational leadership are all areas that should be addressed. With these basic skills in place, attorneys will gain more from traditional marketing training geared toward senior practitioners.

In addition, associates are very aware that business development capabilities will one day be a strong determinant of their progress with the firm. They are hungry for direction and guidance on attaining the means to develop these capabilities. Firm administrators with responsibility for training can utilize in-house

marketing specialists, successful senior attorneys, outside consultants, or a combination thereof to design and present a series of "building blocks" workshops focused on the development of basic marketing skills. It may make sense to mirror the training patterns employed by corporate marketing trainers such as starting training earlier in an attorney's career and easing into the skills-building in a gradual fashion. It can also mean achieving a much higher return later on your marketing training investment.