

## Incentivised leadership

A new model for managing  
partner compensation

**Reputations at risk**  
Navigate client guidelines  
on conflicts of interest

**10 Questions: Vicky Brackett**  
A new series of interviews on  
life as managing partner

**American frontier**  
Expansion strategies  
for overseas law firms

# Power connectors

Partners who focus on giving, not taking, are more successful at business development, Judy Robinett tells Karen Kahn

**A**s managing partner, your leadership will have been profoundly impacted by changes in the legal marketplace over the past 10 years. While you are no doubt keenly aware of the importance of aligning your strategies and lawyers' efforts with how clients and prospects work, transitioning your partners to the most current, effective strategies is a bulky proposition that requires internal conversations, training and execution.

Today, business development strategies that rely on legal expertise alone are no longer adequate; rainmaking success is highly dependent upon the development of sustained, value-based relationships. It is therefore critical that methodologies that build deep, expansive relationships be included and vigorously practiced in your strategic plans.

Judy Robinett, author of *How to Be a Power Connector*, offers such an approach. Karen Kahn speaks with her about how her ideas can be used within law firms.

## What is a power connector?

There are three types of business developers in a law firm: not connected, connected and power connectors.

Not-connected lawyers focus only on what they know and they trust that clients will come to them. Their value proposition as business developers is diminishing in the competitive marketplace.

Connected lawyers meet people at events and speak professionally about the firm, their expertise and their experiences. They often make a good impression but put relationships on hold until the next event.

Power connectors, on the other hand, drive business through building deep, strategic relationships that create value immediately and over time. They

are continuous sources of information, connections and introductions; these activities differentiate them from their competitors.

## Isn't this just networking?

No, most networking is more casual and episodic. Power connecting is far more strategic.

The question for lawyers who want to be power connectors is not 'how can I be more connected?' but rather 'how can I identify and nurture the important connections that will accelerate my ability to bring in business?' Equally important is 'how can I connect with people in such a way that they will take my calls and give me business when any part of their organisation needs a lawyer?'

---

## “Power connector lawyers use writing opportunities to start conversations”

---

## How does this translate on an organisational level to law firms?

Law firms need to think expansively about their entire relationship map: who is connected to whom, both inside and outside of the firm, and how all of these relationships can intermingle to foster business. It is the relational capital of a law firm that does the most for business success.

Research shows that when companies actively seek to develop, nurture and manage a wide network of strategic relationships, they will accrue the kind of relational capital that leads to more referrals, customer satisfaction and success. The more connections each

individual contributes to the whole, the greater the number of opportunities.

## Do partners need to do more than panel presentations, articles and webinars to develop connections?

Absolutely. All powerful connections are based on three elements: people must know you, like you and trust you. For people to know you, you must get out of your comfort zone and into the right rooms – settings frequented by your clients and ideal clients.

Knowing you also means developing a compelling way of talking about yourself. Saying that you are 'a lawyer' or an 'M&A lawyer' or that you work at 'XYZ law firm' is not compelling and doesn't create a point of connection for the other person. Power connectors say things that make them unique and spark a point of interest in the other person; this point of interest establishes the jumping-off point for connection.

Research shows that, to be liked, you must exude warmth and engage others. Asking questions and listening immediately communicates that you want a relationship. So, after you speak, you should leave the podium, connect with people and add more value by asking them what they learned, what questions they have or what they heard that was particularly relevant to their situation.

Power connector lawyers use writing opportunities to start conversations. The act of writing is a beginning to further valuable discussions.

While liking can be created in one meeting, trust is a result of many little actions made over time and through commitments made and kept. To be a power connector, you must provide value over time. Power connectors connect for the long term and they add value first. Adding value first is a prominent feature



of all power connector relationships; they then keep adding value.

### **How should partners change the way they ask for business?**

When you are trying to develop your practice, it is easy to get distracted by your need to bring in a piece of business. That's why, in my opinion, people 'ask' too early in the relationship. When you do this you are not relating – you are taking care of yourself.

On the other hand, giving first sets the foundation for a connection that will last and provide opportunities for both parties. Through giving, you communicate that the other person is important to you. I like doing business with people who I know care about me; I think most people feel that way.

### **How can managing partners and practice group leaders establish a power connection culture?**

First, analyse the firm or practice group's current network. What ecosystems possess relationships that you need to be added to the firm's and practice group's network? This can be industries, government/politics, finance, media, local community and the profession in

general. Who in these systems do you wish to meet? They could be ideal clients, connectors, door openers, colleagues and so on.

Second, determine what the firm and individuals have to offer rather than focusing on what you need for business growth. What knowledge, connections, resources or other opportunities do your clients and prospects need to be successful? Remember, people inhabit organisations, so consider also what the people inside client organisations need.

Third, determine how you are going to approach and become a valuable, ongoing part of each ecosystem by adding value (before you ask for anything).

### **In terms of business development, what is the value proposition of the power connector concept?**

Power connectors build value. Just as billions of computers around the world become the internet, and billions of individual cells form a human body, the people drawn together by a power connector form a community of sorts – they give work, information, resources and introductions to each other, creating a network that grows exponentially in worth.

At the end of the day, what we are talking about is a people-oriented effort. The more skilled each person is, the stronger the entity. And, the more collaboration that is done among people, the more effective power connecting will be as a business development strategy.

---

## **“Giving first sets the foundation for a lasting connection”**

---

Managing partners can increase the value proposition of their firms and drive revenues by integrating power connector concepts into their culture, resulting in the firm as a whole having greater reach than any one person. This would translate into business of course, but also in firms that make contributions beyond the sphere of legal knowledge. <sup>mp</sup>

*Karen B. Kahn is managing partner at Threshold Advisors and author of the forthcoming Daunting to Doable: You Can Make it Rain ([www.thresholdadvisors.com](http://www.thresholdadvisors.com))*