

# Marketing FOR LAWYERS

## Winning Beauty Contests: Six Pointers by Barbara Miller

What does it take to make the short list when you're trying to win new business? Talent? Yes...but what else? Reputation? Yes...but what else? A proposal that passes the "sniff" test? Yes...but what else? Come on. What else? And don't tell me a high-status client list.

A knockout proposal, top talent, a faultless reputation and a heart-stopping client list are crucial components of any winning marketing effort. But let's face it: They're not what gets you the business.

So what does? You, the lawyer, do. You and your focused, attentive, personal presence. You and your communication skills. You and your interactive communication.

To differentiate your offering from others, you have to communicate in a way that potential clients leave your presentation feeling yours is the only firm that really understands their needs.

A sustained business relationship is built on comfort and confidence in communication. While you must bring talent, experience and reputation to the table when courting new business, if you don't also bring everything you know about communication, you're likely to walk away empty-handed. Potential clients don't care half as much about your firm's successes as they care that you understand their problem. And, the way you demonstrate that is by how you communicate.

It's critical that you really get this: Business communication is the key to sustained commerce. A client's comfort with, and confidence in, your communication is more important than how smart or talented you are, what reputation you have or who is on your client list.

So how do you achieve this rapport with potential clients? Easy. Heed the following six basic communication principles when making your marketing presentation and watch what happens. In recent years, several large and prominent firms began practicing my "Six Keys to Effective Communication" and are already seeing powerful results. At this year's annual Legal Marketing Association meeting, I shared the "Six Keys" with attendees. Let me summarize them for you here:

- *People listen for their reasons, not yours.* I don't claim this bit of wisdom as my own, but I have learned to use it. And the clients I've trained to use it can attest to the success its application brings. Management consultant Peter Drucker has said that without a clear understanding of the values that drive others' decisions, the best crafted argument in the world won't win anyone on your side. Why? No one listens to you because you made an elegant argument unless they value elegant argument-making. People listen for their reasons, not yours.

Doing reconnaissance on a potential client's business and organizational perspectives and culture before you structure your presentation is just smart preparation. Pre-interviews, phone calls to business associates, and LEXIS/NEXIS searches are all useful ways to probe for the values under your client's needs. When you uncover a piece of information, always ask, "What is significant about \_\_\_\_\_ for you?" and "Why is that important?"

When you understand both the information and the value context in which it is held, you can position your presentation to support your potential client's style of listening, sorting information and making decisions. It may be just like yours, or it may be 180 degrees different. Making a presentation that appeals to you and your colleagues will only win you the business if your potential client's values match yours 100 percent. Chances are, however, that unless you're pitching another law firm, they'll be quite different. Remember, people listen for their reasons, not yours. When your presentation is aimed at their needs, they'll listen.

- *People will support what they help create.* Across the board, the paradigm of leadership in management and advisory capacities is changing from an "I talk, you listen" approach to one of "I listen, you talk", then we co-create the strategy you support – and promote action to implement it." This is the mentality of empowerment. When you, an attorney of indisputable authority, cast yourself as an all-knowing, all-experienced potential adviser to a new client, you set yourself up for a lot of work and a big fall. You also set yourself up to swim against the current.

With your firm's flawless reputation and bottomless resources, of course, you can and will do anything and everything you promise a potential client. But swimming against the current of empowerment is not only a lot of unnecessary work, it works against your establishing and maintaining a long-term relationship with a new client. Leaving room for the marketplace to interact with your ideas is a critical part of sustaining the interest of the marketplace. Managing silence, asking questions and physically backing up to make space for others to step-into invites your "audience" to participate in a dialogue with you. And it's dialogue, not monologue, that sustains human interest over time. When others have had a hand in creating custom solutions to their needs, they will support the decisions you help them make. It's such a simple truth, but its power is long-lasting.

- *Everything communicates. And then some.* Despite our self-screening, denial and wishful thinking, everything we do and everything we don't do communicates. I wish I could take credit for having said it so succinctly, but it was Roger Ailes who said in his 1988 book that "you are the message." Human beings are stimulus/response mechanisms for each other. Above, below and at our everyday levels of awareness, we signal others with messages of our own values, our status, our education and our likeability. And, the plain truth is: People like to do business with people they like.

Potential clients decide to listen to you based on your appearance, demeanor, language and energy. In a face-to-face communication, your voice carries 38 percent of your communication. Your body carries 55 percent. The brilliant, witty, deep or astute words you choose carry only 7 percent of your actual message. All your education, training and presentation skills are conveyed to your target by your voice and body. The words you've chosen, and even the killer visuals

you've prepared, are given meaning and importance by your audience's perception of your voice and body. And your challenge is winning over their skepticism, because, as everyone knows, "people will tell you anything." Never underestimate—or underprepare for—a potential client's scrutiny of everything you communicate.

- *The message is the message received.* Perception is reality. You wouldn't still be practicing law if you didn't know that. So why is it so hard for attorneys to apply this dictum to their marketing efforts?

Potential (or once-potential) clients may actually be biased, thick or unknowledgeable. But cleaving to that opinion only keeps you from trying to reach them in another way. And then in another way. The fact of the matter is: If they didn't get your point, you didn't send it.

Sending messages includes their effective reception. The only way to get better at ensuring that the message received is the one you want received is to solicit feedback. At the end of presentations, ask "What didn't you see or hear that's important to you?" or, more affirmatively, "Is there anything else important that I need to address?" Some people will equivocate and not be forthcoming. But others will be candid, which will give you a chance to handle any negatives on the spot. I don't care if you're Oliver Wendell Holmes, without feedback it's impossible to gauge the impact of your communication on your audience. This one bit of truth can transform your communication.

- *Monkey see, monkey do.* People like to do business with people they perceive to be a lot like themselves in their thinking and doing. Being able to communicate that you "get" a situation or challenge faced by a potential client depends on much more than what you say. Demonstrating that you understand him or her not just factually but dynamically, depends on your ability to create comfort. And comfort is a product of matching and mirroring behaviors you see others exhibit while you're with them. Matching and mirroring create trust between people at both conscious and unconscious levels. They're such simple techniques, it's hard to believe how powerful they can be.

- *Rehearsal with feedback is the key.* Even if you prefer to prepare presentations Lone-Ranger-style, two, four, or six heads are better than one. Scrimmaging physically and vocally before the "game" is the only way to be certain your strategy and skills will dovetail with the potential client's needs. Videotaped critique and group feedback are critical tools. Why? Because, while you're making your argument, you're probably focusing on your own needs (i.e., to "get the business"). Video feedback and rehearsal afford you an opportunity to watch yourself from the client's perspective, to listen with the client's ears, and to evaluate your offer with the client's needs in mind, not yours. Then you can adjust your communication so the message sent is the one you meant to send – and the one the client wants to receive.

Business communication is the sine qua non to sustained commerce. If you focus on creating and confidence in your communication, yours will be the only name on the "short list" that ever mattered anyway.