

Conquering the Fear of Legal Entrepreneurship in Eight Easy Steps

By K.C. Victor

Whether it is your first time or your thousandth time seeking business, most lawyers have anxiety about entrepreneurial encounters. This feeling is normal. However, when the anxiety associated with seeking business rises to the level of actual fear, it can impinge, delay or even prevent the actions needed to enhance your client base. Here are some basic insights that can minimize that fear and maximize your chances of business success in the legal marketplace.

1. Some Failure Is to Be Expected

Especially at the start, you will not succeed at obtaining most of the business you seek. Nobody does. Even when you are well prepared and can succinctly describe why the services you offer are ideal for a possible new client, remember that the client has a pre-established route for getting its legal work done. Furthermore, if you approached the client and not the other way around, they are

not planning on switching lawyers and will hesitate to do so. It's basic physics — inertia is a constant and it takes significant force for an object to move in a new direction.

2. Try, Try Again

It is perfectly all right, and frequently effective, to approach a new client more than once. Do not fear being too aggressive. The only caveat here is that attempting too often can be annoying and can easily backfire. Take your cue from the prospective client. You may ask something like, "May I call you back in six months?" Just remember that, absent special circumstances, it makes little sense to seek new work from someone any more often than every four months, or even longer if you have already tried more than once.

3. Use Multiple Contacts

It is also fine, and often effective, to approach a potential client through more than one person. Consideration from multiple sources is simply more consideration. This rule is especially true if you have an opportunity to connect through a businessperson important within or to the prospective client. A survey conducted many years ago concerning who determines which lawyers get hired within corporations found that in the majority of cases it is the business people and not the in-house counsel who guide legal selections. Still, in-house lawyers are very important and virtually always have veto rights. Try to be introduced to

as many people within an organization as possible.

4. Don't Overcommit Yourself

Regardless of the strength of your personal connections to a possible client, it is always a bad idea to seek work that you cannot service, either because of a lack of expertise or of time. Courting failure breeds future fear. Fear of seeking business is only one sort of fear that lawyers may have. Courting a client sure to be dissatisfied with your work will create fear in doing the actual work as well. You will produce a bad product, thereby hurting your ego. This will create more fear (this time based in reality) about seeking work.

5. Ask Why

If you are turned down once and for all, try to find out why. Have the courage to ask. It may not be personal at all. Sometimes it is as simple as the fact that one of your colleagues is anathema to that client — a former in-law or something along those lines. When you know why you will not get business in your current circumstances, you will know whether you can

approach this client later should either of your circumstances change.

6. Remember Repeat Business

The people most likely to give you work are the people who have given you work before — asking them for more work will maximize your chances of success. While you may not be thought of for all of your clients' needs, if they like your work, they will never be offended when you ask for more. If you don't get more work, you will at least feel that you were welcome to ask — a good fear-diminishing technique.

7. Prepare Yourself

Preparation for all business seeking meetings is crucial to your comfort during them. If you prepare well for any personal, telephone or e-mail encounter, even if you come up empty-handed, you will at least know that you did your best. It is crucial to know how your skills and other attributes mesh with the needs of your potential client. For example, it makes no sense for someone who

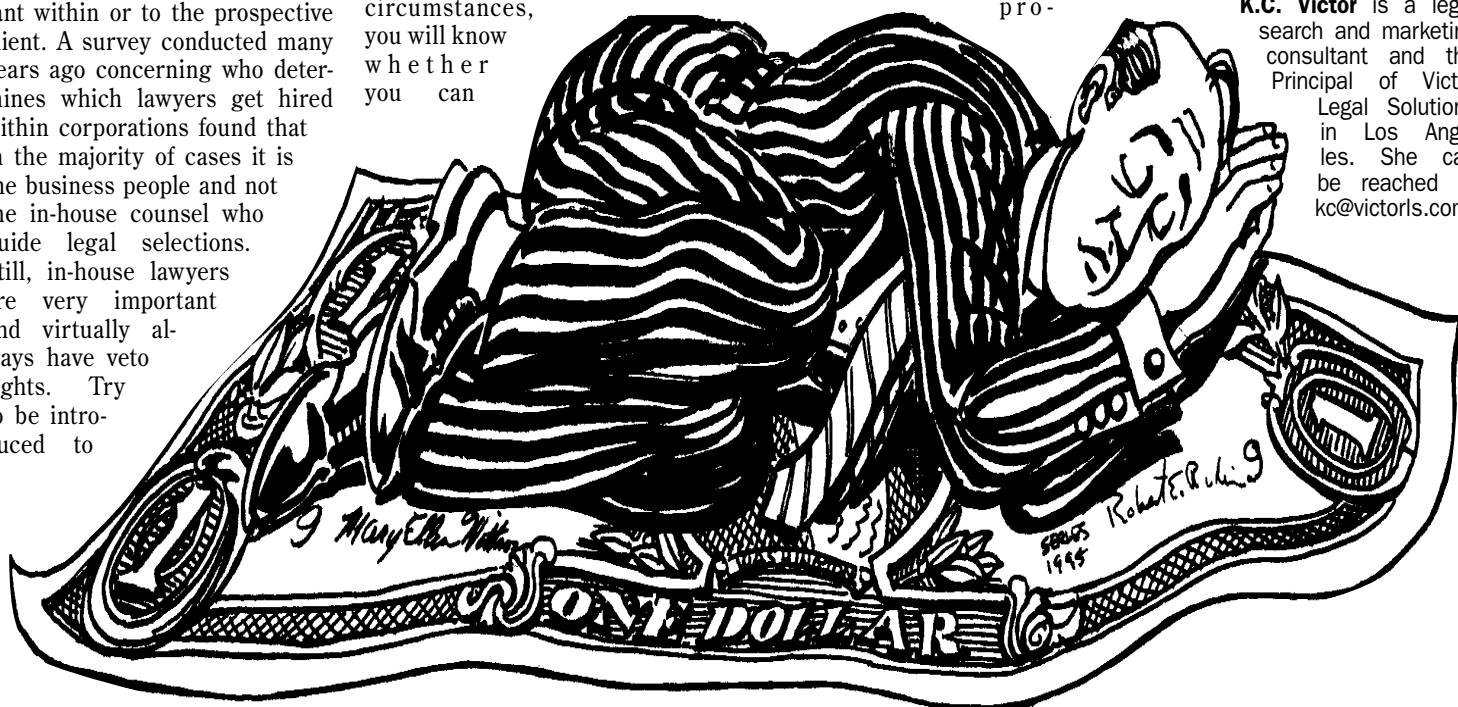
intends to seek a client who is extremely budget-conscious and willing to pay only for good work, not perfection.

8. Alter Expectations

Change your vision of success. If your vision of success means getting business, most of the time you will believe yourself a person who is unsuccessful. Think of success in business as coming in increments. Success is realizing someone you know is a possible client. Success is calling that person and getting through. Success is explaining why you want to meet and then arranging for a meeting. If you can find something to feel successful about in every venture, whether or not you achieve your ultimate goal, you will have less fear about venturing out in the future.

We fear being viewed as failures by others, but most of all we fear being viewed as failures by ourselves. Knowing that the road is arduous, repetitive and full of potholes for almost everyone can help eliminate fear. Good luck.

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