
Get referrals

- Is this your top priority?** For many lawyers, referrals are the single best source for new clients. It's much harder to get business from a stranger than from someone who's been referred. The hardest part is getting the referral.
- Spontaneous referrals** When a partner, a friend or a client offers to introduce you to someone, follow up immediately. Thank them, then define a specific next step such as scheduling a meeting for all three of you. If that's too much to ask, consider requesting that your contact make a call or send an introductory email. If your contact seems uncomfortable or unlikely to follow up soon, ask if you can call the person directly and whether it's OK to use your contact's name.
- Soliciting referrals** If you wait for others to offer spontaneous referrals, you will miss out on many opportunities. Whenever you get a compliment, ask for a referral. Then make a list of clients you've pleased in the past, colleagues, and friends, and actively solicit referrals from them.
- How to ask** Practice a general request like this: "I've been setting up meetings lately with people who can help me brainstorm the best way to [insert a general statement about your specialty here, e.g. work with biotech firms, improve estate planning, etc.]. Do you know anyone I should meet?" Test it out on a few colleagues, then start asking. Plan to make 5 requests to get 1 or 2 referrals.
- Follow up** As soon as you get a name, immediately contact them to set up a face to face meeting. If you must wait for someone else to set up a meeting, see if there's anything you can do to help, such as drafting an introductory letter. If there's a delay, find out why. Obviously, your relationship with the referrer will determine exactly how aggressive you can be here. But people who offer referrals will usually appreciate conscientious follow-up. When you first meet, don't try to sell yourself. Ask for advice and listen to them, until you understand what they want and need.
- Thank people** When people give you referrals, you can't thank them too much. Send emails, handwritten notes, chocolates, and lunch. Occasionally, you will find people who have large networks and are generous with referrals. Treasure them, thank them, and buy them expensive gifts.
- Take the first step today** List five people who might give you referrals – satisfied clients, partners in your firm, college friends, and distant relatives. Contact all five and ask for referrals.