

Sales Confidence

Build it and they will come

By Harry Keshet, Ph.D. and Catherine MacDonagh, Esq.

Can you sell without confidence? Probably not. It is something that you need to develop so that you can remove obstacles to your success. Developing the right skills and understanding how to work with your natural strengths help you build the confidence you need.

Besides giving you a foundation for understanding and building your sales confidence, you'll find exercises in this chapter. They will help you to develop tools to become more effective at developing business and to stay on a productive course.

THE GOOD NEWS

Whether you are a strong woman or you feel like a fake, sales confidence affects your business development. No matter where you are on the confidence scale, there's good news: you can relax and be yourself.

There's no question that, for many people, sales can be uncomfortable. Learning about the buying and selling processes helps you feel more at ease, for you understand that there are many different contexts in which you are operating and that there are different styles of selling. This comfort and understanding gives way to sales confidence and success. Even the most doubting woman can develop a thriving practice.

WHY BEING SMART OR WORKING FOR A BIG FIRM JUST AREN'T ENOUGH

In some ways, the means by which you received training in law school not only taught you great skills, it also, for many, taught doubt. Losing the case for a client, being at the wrong side of the table and not obtaining the best deal through negotiation are events that cause anxiety and fear in many lawyers.

Law schools don't teach courses how to promote yourself or develop self-confidence. Since selling is about promoting yourself and overcoming obstacles to get to the engagement, the win of the deal, the closing of the sale, you probably don't feel prepared.

So how do you become confident enough to walk into a room of people you don't know, insert yourself into a conversation, introduce yourself, and begin the relationship-building process? Or, walk into a presentation with other senior partners, some of them older and perhaps more experienced than you, and become a force in the sales opportunity with the confidence you need to obtain new business for your firm? Many resources exist to help you on your way.

RAINMAKING SKILLS

Learning how to sell makes you feel more comfortable, so it is important to look at – and appreciate – the skills you already have. Understanding that selling is something you

can learn and do in a way that is comfortable for you directly affect your sales confidence.

Leigh-Ann Patterson, a Boston lawyer who also writes and speaks about business development, says it best: "if you can teach yourself the rule against perpetuities, you can teach yourself rainmaking." Doesn't that immediately give you confidence that this is something you can do?

Studies of rainmakers reveal the skills required for success. Larry Richard, Ph.D. conducted a study of 95 lawyers who were judged by their peers to be "excellent attorneys." He divided the group into two categories: "successful rainmaker" and "service partner."

Richard found statistically significant differences between groups in three areas: Ego drive, Empathy and Resilience. Rainmakers score higher than service partners on each of these measures.

Ego drive is the desire to persuade others "for the sake of persuasion." Empathy is the ability to shift perspective to understand how others perceive the world. Resilience is the ability to "bounce back" from criticism or rejection.

What does this study suggest for women attorneys seeking to develop their practice? First, rainmaking is different from developing a successful practice. You don't need to be a rainmaker to be successful. However, you may need to learn some of the skills noted in the study to be a rainmaker.

Second, many women attorneys already have many of the skills identified in the study. They are naturally empathetic. Just knowing about these skills helps you to zero in on those you need to develop in order to feel more confident.

WOMEN: NATURALS AT RELATIONSHIP SELLING

Women lawyers bring unique attributes to the sales processes. In fact, there's plenty of evidence to suggest that, since women are naturals at building relationships, it's entirely likely that, in time, and with the growth of women lawyers in the market place, they will outshine men as the rainmakers.

In various measures of personality traits, women consistently score high on interpersonal abilities. They are more likely than men to be accommodating, accepting, empathetic, and compassionate. While the down side of this is that women are sometimes then perceived as not strong enough to make things happen, the truth is that these abilities are requirements for relationship building. And the ability to form and develop relationships is a major strength in business development and selling.

In fact, women are so good at establishing rapport that they can become quite close to the target. The irony is that sometimes they feel that they cannot ask for business from someone so close!

But what if you were to change the way you think of selling? For example, you might just try to be helpful to someone with whom you have a relationship. Wouldn't it be a shame if you didn't help someone you care about with a legal or business problem because you didn't want to "sell" to them? By not opening this door, you're actually keeping the other person from accessing the kind of information and powerful resources you can provide. Business is not distinct from relationships; they are all one and the same.

We love the story of a senior litigator who was well experienced, well known as a terrific trial lawyer and who had amazing connections. So why did she lack sales confidence? She said that it was because she was so close to her connections. When asked whether she didn't want to try to help her contacts, she replied "No, don't want to abuse the relationship by asking for help."

How did she overcome this? By understanding that her contacts had a way out - they have choices. You can HAVE a business conversation. Your contacts will let you know whether they don't want to go there. Why not simply ask what's going on, offer to help, and let the other person make their choice?

You can be the same kind of natural, empathic listener you are for your friends. Much time is spent coaching men on how to ask an open-ended question, and then stop talking and listen. This is the kind of thing women do all the time without thinking of it as a sales skill. Many times, just asking a contact about what is worrying them or what's going on gives you a chance to be helpful.

Sometimes, just figuring out what you will say by writing it down and/or role-playing helps get you beyond your inhibition. We know an outgoing lawyer that had great relationships with other professionals (scientists, accountants, etc.). But she would not ask them to help her get referrals. When it was suggested that she try saying, "we're both trying to develop our careers, let's help each other out" she said, "I'm not comfortable, it's too close."

But isn't that the point?!

Coaching helped this lawyer to be able to talk so that she felt competent and comfortable in this type of conversation. For example, her coach asked: "Why not try having the conversation? You could then apologize, saying you feel bad about talking with her this way because she's your friend?"

She tried this and her friend was so happy! And she never had to apologize either. Besides a happy ending, this was a sales confidence boost for this lawyer, who went on to build an enviable referral network using this approach.

In 1997, the consulting firm Coulter King O'Neill, conducted a study of buyers. They set out to learn things like whether buyers prefer dealing with male or female salespeople. What do they find are the differences between the two?

The results were interesting. On balance, most of the buyers interviewed were men decision-makers. They generally felt that women are more honest, quicker to admit that they don't know the answer and quick to respond with the answer from the right resource at their firm.

Most decision-makers found that men were not as good at listening as were women. However, they also indicated that women were slow to get to the point and that they shouldn't be afraid to ask for the business. Assertiveness is a positive characteristic. Given that most of us are dealing with strong decision-makers and clients on a daily basis, it's a characteristic that is respected.

Many women can take the perspective of others. This allows you to better anticipate the needs of clients and to interact comfortably with prospects. You can easily put people at ease and help carry a conversation or help people feel included and a part of the conversation. These abilities and inclinations are the strengths women bring to building their reputations and getting known with confidence and ease.

Horwitz agrees: "Building relationships is what women do naturally. If we could only get out of our own way and recognize that the key to selling/business development is building and maintaining relationships, I believe the rainmaking potential of women is greater than any of us currently imagines."

So how do you get out of your own way? Becoming more confident helps a great deal. And women have some interesting ways of boosting their confidence, such as "superlearning" to really feel really competent, finding a mentor or looking at things in entirely new ways.

SUPERLEARNING AND THE BIG SWITCH

A woman professional tends to feel like she needs to know so much in order to feel like she is a skilled, competent professional. We call this "superlearning" and it helps women to feel that they know enough. In turn, this helps them to feel more confident.

Lawyer: "I'm not sure I have a right to say that I know what I'm doing, that I'm a bona fide, talented, skilled lawyer."

Coach: "Well, how much do you have to know to sell, to be an authority or to help people?"

When asked what her specialty was and what she was really good at, this woman lawyer said, "compared to other people I know who are really good, I don't even think I can call myself a real expert." When asked why she said that, the lawyer responded, "Because there ARE other people that can do this better than me."

Coach: "How does this relate to business development?"

Lawyer: "Because I need to know 95% to feel like I can say that I want to do your work."

It doesn't matter whether you're an expert; it matters that you can solve a client's problem! If you can, then you are expert ENOUGH to help the client. This is not some abstract idea.

Coach: "So, where does this come from, the need to know so much?"

Lawyer: "It's based on what I think other successful women know. I went to a meeting of them and got the courage there to say that I feel that I'm kind of a fake that I didn't really know as much as they did. The woman next to me said, "you stole my line! I don't really know that much..." Well, it turns out that 8 out of the 10 in the room felt that way, even though they were all top-notch professionals."

Finally, one of them told the group: "We're all excellent professionals and we all deserve to be here. Start acting like the skilled professional you are!"

So now you know. "Superlearning" does not help with business development. Here's where the switch happens. It's all about how to use what you know to solve the client's problem. It's about the application of knowledge.

Yes, there's some risk because you don't know everything. But you have the capacity to learn how to get the answers you need. This switch provides a different kind of confidence in the sales process.

FEELING COMPETENT BOOSTS YOUR CONFIDENCE

To get hired, attorneys need to build a great reputation. They also need to get known by existing and potential clients by demonstrating that they have the required expertise to resolve their matters. This means showing knowledge and understanding of issues and using interpersonal skills that builds client trust and confidence. Both technical knowledge and interpersonal skills are required for success.

The following activities help build a reputation and increase exposure to existing clients and prospects. They also boost confidence!

- Do excellent work and find appropriate ways of informing clients, prospects, and referral sources of your accomplishments.
- Write. Contribute to a newsletter or client advisory. Publish articles and use them to meet with people that can hire you. Use it as an opening to discussing their needs and problems in such a way that gives them confidence that you can help them.
- Network. Join a business or industry association (don't just talk with lawyers at bar associations!) and be an active participant.

- Speak. Host and speak at seminars with other attorneys and professionals on subjects of interest to specific industries. Speak at trade organizational meetings, answering questions and meeting with members of the audience after your talk.

When engaged in these activities, there is a degree of persuasion required to clearly - and at times, strongly - state your points and give advice. Some women attorneys feel more comfortable and skillful at promoting themselves when they are in the "lime light" and stating their points in a way that conveys competence.

Being in the lime light can be uncomfortable if one thinks of it as being more on display than showing one's competency. Successful women build their confidence at speaking and interacting by taking the time to be very prepared. They know their subject and the spotlight is on their knowledge. This positions them as knowledge brokers. They can persuade based on the confidence they have in their knowledge and in themselves as problem solvers.

If you can do these things, you will feel you've earned the right to consider yourself an expert. In turn, you will gain sales confidence.

THE RESILIENCE FACTOR

"To be resilient is to be both strong and flexible. You also have to be willing to examine and understand your experience and take the opportunity to learn from it. You learn about your strengths and weaknesses, your illusions, beliefs and values, relationship patterns, what worked and what didn't work, and you learn about other people and about the world. Knowledge is power. When you take the opportunity to learn all these things each time you stumble in life, you will naturally develop confidence in yourself and in your ability to deal with similar situations in the future. "

- Shirley Vandersteen, Ph. D., C. Psych.

For many people the ability to "bounce back " from criticism or rejection is an acquired skill. Studies of women often note that they often attribute being criticized or rejected as a result of a personal flaw and take such remarks or behaviors as painful indication of inadequacy.

For most people, business development and selling by their very natures are not quick roads to success. It can take a great deal of time before women lawyers understand the sales and buying processes thoroughly enough so that they are don't take it personally when a prospect doesn't buy her services. For example, establishing rapport is just one step in the selling process. It is also a step in creating a long and lasting relationship.

Building your reputation and getting known takes time. It is a process of repetition without much immediate reward. Over time, prospects hear people speak many times,

read articles they write, see them at meetings and meet them personally. It is from these multiple contacts that a reputation is developed and women attorneys become known.

There will be many times that little or no new business gets generated from a good deal of effort. This is not the fault of the attorney. This is not a criticism or a rejection. This is the reality resulting from a slow and steady process. Neither Rome, nor a law practice, is built in a day.

Lack of success is not a personal failure! And don't attribute the successes you do have as accidents. This undermines your own competency. So, if the sale doesn't happen, you need to de-personalize the failure. This is business, even if it feels personal. It's probably not about you, even if it sometimes feels that way. So, resiliency is important for any woman who will be successful.

Bouncing back is especially relevant to confidence. As Dr. Robert Schuller says, "You are what you think about all day long." You can't hang on to why someone didn't hire you, analyzing to the nth degree why you weren't chosen. This only erodes your feelings of competence and confidence. Remember: you cannot control others, so learn what you need to from an unsuccessful sale and then MOVE ON. Getting stuck in a downward spiral only serves to make you wonder why you weren't good enough, smart enough, or why that person didn't like you.

"Dare to risk public criticism." (Mary Kay Ash). Sometimes, the more successful you are, the more resilient you must be! In the words of the eloquent writer-lawyer John O. Cunningham: "Great people draw great criticism...Defeat is the inevitable consequence of standing up for character." Think Dr. Martin Luther King, Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy, just to name a few. These are people who displayed tremendous resilience. Their confidence is what helped them to overcome resistance, criticism and all kinds of failure.

So what can you do to boost your resiliency? Since you can't change what has happened, you can only work on your reaction to it. Develop good coping mechanisms and find ways to creatively solve problems (which you are good at!) and you will become resilient.

You can also figure out what helps you to heal when you're feeling rejected, go do it and get back into action. Keep items of inspiration around you, such as books (read Zander's The Art of Possibility) or quotes from people you admire. Do something healthy which makes you feel better, like take a long walk, workout, go to yoga class.

Here are some great quotes about resiliency; they're here for you when you need some motivation:

That which does not kill us makes us stronger. - Friedrich Nietzsche

The faster you fail the sooner you succeed. - Motto of the innovation company, Ideo

Whether you believe you can or you can't, you're right. - Henry Ford

No life is so hard that you can't make it easier by the way you take it.
- Ellen Glasgow

You don't see the world as *it* is but as *you* are. - Goethe

JUST SAY NO TO NEGATIVES

In his book "Even Eagles Need a Push," David McNally writes: "Clearly what distinguishes truly successful people is that they are contributors. They are in love with life and all the possibilities of what it means to be human. Their accomplishments, their successes, are rooted in their desire to grow and be of service to humanity."

Think of the possibilities you have and what they mean to you. By continuing to focus on what is ahead, you will keep moving forward and little can get in the way, including negative people, thoughts, criticisms and fear. You will have greater confidence, which allows you to realize the possibilities and reach your goals.

Positive thinking is much more productive than negative self-doubt. Developing positive thinking doesn't mean that instantly you will not have negative thoughts. What it does mean is that when negative thoughts come, you are able to recognize them and let them go. Over time you will notice a lessening of their effects on you. They become merely thoughts without power or influence. When this happens, they fade and dissolve. Remembering and acting on your positive thoughts weakens the negative and opens up the possibilities of discovery, mastery and confidence.

Even women who are confident, successful and generally positive have to be reminded once in a while to refocus on ourselves and take the time to tune in to WII-FM or What's In It For Me? The more you focus on success the more you will achieve your own. The more success you have, the more confident you'll be.

Getting and keeping clients and doing great work wraps all the positive things together on one package. Find and recognize the things about being a lawyer that you feel passionate about. If it's working with clients and others toward successful outcomes, then go for more of it!

BUILDING YOUR CONFIDENCE

You must want to dedicate time to support the goals of the most important person in your life—you. When you set goals and then achieve them, you will build your self-confidence and your sales confidence.

Exercise 1: Strengths, weaknesses, friends and foes

First, list what you think are your strong points. Identify accomplishments that have made you proud of yourself

Now list any fears or obstacles you'd like to overcome.

Next, list the people in your business and personal life who you trust and who can help you build a successful career. These are people with whom you want to spend more time.

Last, list the people in your business and personal life who never seem to be able to ask about you, about what's important to you and the people who are not necessarily fun or productive to be around. In fact, they may be people who can't seem to do anything but criticize. These are people with whom you need to spend less time. The time you save not being with these people is time you can put toward your business development.

Now review your lists, beginning with your achievements. You probably reached them because you had a goal and as many would say on a larger scale, a sense of purpose. How long has it been since you felt this way about your career and your needs?

Exercise 2: The feeling of success.

It only takes a minute, but it's very valuable.

Close your eyes and count to 10 and breathe deeply as you count. Now, think about a time in your life when you reached a goal—it could have been a running race you won, a victory in court, trying something you were afraid you would fail at and conquering it, like skiing, hiking or writing a brief.

As you think about your accomplishment (and hopefully it's one that made you smile) picture yourself achieving it. Now, give yourself a sign (a pinch on the hand with the other hand is my sign) that will, at a moment's notice, allow you to recall this great feeling all over again and bring you to that feeling of accomplishment and success.

This may corny, but even the most accomplished of you reading this book will find that it's a really great tool to have to boost confidence on a moment's notice.

OK, so now you've got a secret weapon for recalling your successes and bouncing back. Take this with you when you are in selling situations that cause hesitation for any reason – feeling like a failure, too tired, not outgoing enough, hate networking events...and you will muster up the strength to go the extra mile for that moment.

FIND A GOOD MENTOR

Finding a mentor can really help in a lot of areas besides business development, such as practice management, making your way through your firm's or clients' political mazes and the like. But the best reason to have a mentor is to establish support for you. Your mentor can be your sounding board, supporter, listener, advisor, teacher, and sometimes, though it's not necessary, your friend.

Pick someone you admire, trust and respect, someone you know will offer good, practical advice on the things you can do to develop your sales confidence. Many young women attorneys have learned the art and science of "working a room" while networking alongside a mentor. If you find the right one, your mentor will guide you through the sales process and just knowing that your mentor is there as a safety net can add to your confidence.

Being a women lawyer means juggling a lot sometimes. For many, work-life balance issues affect their selling confidence, for some simply cannot make time in their busy schedules to attend events either early in the morning or late at night. For others, firm culture plays a role.

The most important thing is to find a mentor who will understand who and where you are in your life. So, no matter what your situation may be, a good mentor will help you to

make business development the priority that it should be for you. There are plenty of sales contexts, and many different places and times for business development. A mentor can help identify the right opportunities for you.

THE DILEMMA OF THE STRONG WOMAN

What about the “strong” woman, who seems to have plenty of sales confidence? Her strength plays a role in the selling process, both for her and for her prospect.

The strong woman may have confidence, but what they have in common with those who don't is how to deal with rejection and the need for support. Because when that strong woman doesn't make the sale, she needs to have the same resiliency and support, but others may not see her need for support or give the support because she is strong. This dilemma is real. Talk about a Catch-22!

So strong women, like anyone else, need to seek out others who will give them the pat on the back they need, allow them to be vulnerable and to ask for the support that's needed to get them back on track. Asking for help does not make you weak, it just means you need support. Strength is the power to know what you need when you feel weak or vulnerable and to ask for what you need from someone who has the capacity to support you.

Being a strong woman can be lonely. Spouses, partners, and co-workers may not understand the complex issues of being a strong woman. So, if this is you, try to find other women and men you can turn to who will be understanding of what you are going through and who will accept your pain, let you get it out and let you keep your sense of strength.

Stay resilient and don't let your pain rule your thinking. If you swallow your pain, it will create knee-jerk reactions to things and reduce your strength so that you won't have the space to react thoughtfully and strategically. In turn, this affects your confidence.

Strong women who are able to aggressively go after work may be seen as behaving too much like a man, lacking sensitivity, being too pushy, etc. This can be devastating because it can be used against a woman to push her away, make her feel irrelevant or, worse yet, attacked. So, a counter attack, such as using humor or factual statements can help.

FEELERS AND THINKERS

The Myers Briggs Type Index, which is commonly used to identify personality characteristics, indicates that 65% of women are “Feeling” types, while 35% of men are “Feeling” types.”

This demonstrates clearly that women are more empathetic, tender, concerned about the effects of decisions on people and relationships, able to take the role of the other person and more easily see another's point of view, and better anticipate responses. These are wonderful traits for sales because you will be able to see the client's needs

more easily than men will. Plus, you are naturally better about continuing to nurture the relationship, which is what client development is all about.

IT'S NOT SELLING, IT'S HELPING

Now that you're listening for it, you will become aware that there are opportunities in conversations where you could be helpful...your ear will change!

You will have confidence in knowing that you have the experience and the knowledge and the connections to other lawyers that would be resources for your clients. By being a problem-solver, you will be HELPFUL, caring and loving. Try: "tell me about that, maybe I can be helpful."

Being helpful (rather than trying to sell) helps you to feel GOOD, more confident about yourself. Selling is not about overpowering someone to get what YOU want and it's not about undue influence.

For women lawyers, putting selling into the problem-solving category switches it from being about power to nurturing a relationship. Not only does this give women a leg up over men - it's a sure way to improve sales confidence.

Thinking Out of the Box 44 "Slay a Dragon"

Long ago, map-makers sketched dragons on maps as a sign to sailors that they would be entering unknown territory at their own risk. Some sailors took this sign literally and were afraid to venture on. Others saw the dragons as a sign of opportunity, a door to virgin territory. Similarly, each of us has a mental map of the world complete with dragons. WHERE DOES FEAR HOLD YOU BACK? WHAT DRAGONS CAN YOU SLAY?"