

A 6-Step Framework For Legal Industry Professional Growth

By **Lana Manganiello** (May 9, 2022, 5:12 PM EDT)

Not all work is created equal and staying busy doesn't mean you are doing what you should be doing to achieve your bigger goals.

In part one of this two-part article, I discuss how implementing a framework will help you focus your professional growth strategy.

The legal profession announced record-breaking profits in 2021, and all signs suggest that trend will continue through 2022. Now that most practitioners are busier than ever, with many scrambling to meet existing client demands, it is the perfect time for attorneys to consider and prioritize their business development strategy.



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When you are busy with work you are afforded the opportunity to think about what you actually like doing and how you want your practice to look in the future. You have the benefit of being able to say no to work that isn't in line with your long-term goals.

And given that most firms are currently struggling to attract and retain legal talent, and you will only ever have 24 hours in a day to bill, growing a volume practice is not a viable path to growth for the majority of practitioners.

In today's legal marketplace, creating a niche practice is the most effective way to develop and monetize your expertise.

In his book "The Business of Expertise," David Baker says the enterprise of expertise

will be successful if we move the needle on behalf of respectful clients who align with our mission, willingly paying a price premium for our hard-won, non-interchangeable expertise, letting us direct the process as experts who have found the most effective way to create change, all the while keeping us significantly engaged to keep learning and growing.

Becoming a known expert in a niche relevant to your ideal clients and contacts is the most effective way to build credibility and to focus your marketing efforts.

Implementing the six-step ADAPTS framework will help you identify, shape and bolster the professional reputation necessary to attract your ideal clients and build your ideal practice.

6 STEP BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FRAMEWORK

A

ASSESSMENT

D

DELEGATION

A

ASCERTAINMENT

P

POSITIONING

T

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

S

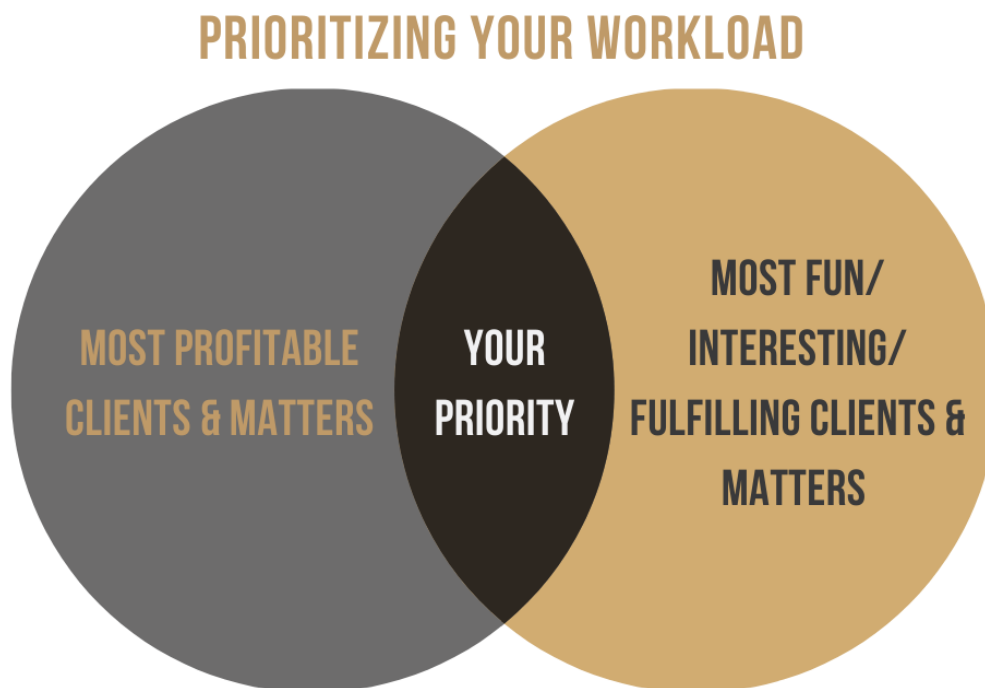
STRATEGY

1. Assessment

Start by assessing your current work. Review your clients and recent matters to get clear on:

- Which of your clients and matters are most profitable or financially valuable?
- Which of your clients and matters are the most fun/interesting/fulfilling/in line with your ideal future practice?

We want to prioritize the work that overlaps those two things.



Source: Equinox Strategy Partners

2. Delegation

Think about work you can delegate. If it is not something you have identified as a priority in the assessment step and someone else can do it, consider handing it off.

3. Ascertainment

Identify who you want to work with.

A strategy for growth around expertise requires that you be very clear about who your ideal next-tier client is, in the narrowest and most specific sense. Make a list of 10-20 of your ideal, next-tier clients —

not categories, but actual individual entities that you would love to have as clients in five years.

Now get clear on who needs to know you, and who you need to know to get hired by these entities for the work you want to do. Is it in-house counsel at pharmaceutical companies? Human resources directors at software companies? Tax controversy attorneys focused on trusts?

Again, getting as narrow here as possible will make the next steps clearer and will quicken your path to success.

4. Positioning

Determine how you want to be known in the marketplace to appeal to your ideal client.

Now that you are clear on whom you need to be in front of, you need to get clear on what is important to them. What kind of qualifications are they interested in from their counsel? Do some research on professionals in your space that have practices or a reputation you admire.

With a quick Google search you can usually find out what organizations these professionals are involved in, topics they write or speak about, certifications or additional education they've obtained, and awards and recognitions they have received. You may be inspired or find ideas that appeal to you.

5. Thought Leadership

How can you demonstrate your unique expertise in an area that your target contacts care about? This falls into a category often called thought leadership and includes speaking engagements, webinars, articles, blogs, white papers, social media posts, video series, podcasts, etc.

Consistently reminding the marketplace that you are active and leading the conversation in your area of expertise is key in becoming a known expert. Developing these thought leadership pieces is also a great way to hone your expertise.

We typically encourage our attorney clients to select a unique topic that demonstrates a high level of sophistication in their practice area and niche, even if there is limited application, and then focus all of their business development messaging around that topic for 12 months.

It's best to align your thought leadership with esteemed platforms that will boost your credibility with your target contacts and ideal clients — such as publications, associations, organizations and conferences.

Think about how you can offer and deliver value around the niche information relevant to your target clients. Collaborating with respected professionals in complimentary practices on thought leadership — such as coauthoring an article, partnering on a presentation or being a guest on a podcast — is a great way to leverage their expertise to boost your credibility and get exposure among their network. Most significantly, it typically means you don't have to shoulder all the work on your own.

And once you have developed a topic, it's useful to leverage that time and effort and repurpose your work across formats and platforms — i.e., using your published article as the foundation for a webinar hosted with a professional organization, editing your firm-hosted webinar into a series of short videos you post on social media.

Experts who have been quiet in the marketplace for an extended period will start to lose recognition and credibility with their key contacts, so it is important to prioritize this kind of strategic exposure even when you are busy.

6. Strategy

Write down your ideal marketing plan based on the steps above. Giving yourself a week to complete each step is one way to approach the ADAPTS framework. Don't worry about the timeline as you think through and write down your ideal growth strategy. Define in the narrowest way who your next-tier target clients are and how you want to be known professionally in five years.

Write down who your target contact categories are. What organizations would you like to be involved in to meet people in your target categories? What thought leadership would you pursue? What topics do you want to be known as the go-to expert in?

A clear vision of what you would like to make happen for yourself professionally is the first step in realizing it. In part two, we will discuss ways to include strategic and effective business development activities into your already very busy workday.

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