

# **7 SECRETS TO A REFERRAL SURGE IN YOUR PERSONAL INJURY LAW PRACTICE**



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# "7 Secrets to a Referral Surge in Your Personal Injury Law Practice"

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**The old myth** is that if you take good care of your clients they will appreciate you and send their friends. And, if you've been in business a long time, you've seen it happen. I call it “Know, like, trust—and send a birthday card”.

Sure it works a tiny bit—RARELY, but mostly it doesn't work—at all. I hate to burst your bubble, but the “negative view” holds a lot more truth in this particular instance. So let's burst that bubble so you can learn what really works.

**There is an overwhelming statistical likelihood that your best clients will NEVER refer a single case to you.**

In most personal injury law firms, 80-99% of clients, including the very best clients, never refer a single case.

There are only two reasons clients refer and there are only two reasons clients don't refer. Firstly, clients refer when they *notice* the opportunity to do so. The corollary, of course, is that they don't refer when they don't notice the opportunity to do so.

This goes to the Reticular Activation System (RAS) in the brain. It determines what you notice and what you give priority to.

Secondarily, after noticing, clients refer when they associate more positive feelings to referring than they do to doing nothing. Said

another way, the perceived social risk of reaching out to refer often causes hesitation. The hesitant or confused mind says no.

## 7 Steps To Multiply Your Referrals

**STEP 1:** Identify your referrers.

Dig into your data and find all your referrers. How many people have referred a case in the whole glorious history of your law firm? This is a list of people who noticed, and, when they noticed, spoke up—at least that one time.

Let's make sure they have positive associations with the action they once took. If they stuck out their neck the one time and then never heard back from you, they are very likely NOT to notice next time. They may now associate referring with negative feelings. ("They never thanked me!" "Did I do it wrong?")

Do you *appreciate* what they've done for you? It's a pretty awesome thing. You've probably invested a lot in various marketing efforts that never brought you a single case. Yet this person brought you a case all by themselves—for free.

Were they rewarded? I don't mean "Did you make an illegal contribution to their children's college fund?" Did you reward them *emotionally*? Or did you do a sterile rote acknowledgment?

Did you powerfully express your gratitude and appreciation for how kind they were in having their friend's back? Did they receive a token of your esteem? (Some negligible small thing your bar association would approve—like a card for instance?)

Suppose for the moment that it was a card and nothing more.

How many people signed it? Was there a warm, handwritten note? Did the emotions of appreciation and thanks radiate out? Was it colorful? Was it beautiful?

Was it impossible to put in the trash? (Yes, many people receiving a beautiful heartfelt handwritten card would NEVER throw it out because it is an emotional highlight in their life.)

What would it do for your clients' noticing, if they got a keepsake from you that gave them a positive emotional glow?

**STEP 2:** Thank and reward your past referrers.

If you have not properly thanked the people who previously sent you a case, it's not too late. Even if it was years ago. And it's time to learn to take maximum advantage of the opportunity to reinforce the desired behaviour.

Why not send a letter telling them that you were reflecting on the amazing fact that they cared enough about their cousin Joe to get him to call you when he was injured at work. Well, Joe did call you and Joe is a great guy and you've been so pleased to be able to help Joe with his Workers Comp claim.

And you kicked yourself when you realized that you had not properly thanked your lovely client for sending Joe. So this little letter (though late) is my way of saying thank you so much. I appreciate you.

And I appreciate Joe too.

**STEP 3:** Hold a Client Appreciation Party for your referrers.

There are multiple objectives that can be met with one well run client appreciation/recognition party. One thing to understand about the Reticular Activating System is that it has levels, and then levels beyond those levels and then levels beyond *those* levels.

It can be cranked up higher and higher and higher.

Let me tell you exactly how to crank the Reticular Activation Systems of your best clients up to 11. This will take care of the *noticing* part of the equation. And it will go a long way towards cranking up their *willingness* as well.

Hold a fun event to honor and thank all the best referrers you've ever had. Has anybody ever referred two cases?

Awesome! What about three referrals? More?

Even if you only have single referrers, make a list of those who you consider to be your Ambassadors and potential Ambassadors. Invite them them to your event. Feed them, entertain them, engage them.

Whatever you do, make it fun. You will be surprised that your best referrers will often crank up to a higher “gear” of referring after connecting with you and your staff more deeply.

One side benefit that is pretty cool is that your staff will be energized seeing up close and personal the wonderful benefits you all bring to these happy shiny people. That cranks up *their* Reticular Activation Systems and *their* willingness to refer as well. (Annual staff referral contest with alluring vacation prize?)

Your Ambassadors will feel great as you acknowledge them and appreciate them, and as they see so many smiles and hear so many laughs.

**STEP 4:** Re-leverage the party.

Let's say 50 people were invited and twenty-two showed up. Now you can follow up with everyone who could not make it and share with them the joy and fun, the images and/or videos of the great night. This too will crank up the noticing for your referrers who were not able to attend the big night. They may be more motivated to attend the next one.

And, of course re-leverage the images and feelings and joy with the people who did attend. Thank them again, acknowledge them and show them the beautiful smiles of the attendees.

**STEP 5:** Use "Social Proof"\* to crank the RAS of your entire database of clients.

You can use the images and sounds you capture at your Client Appreciation Parties to pry open the RAS of the rest of your database of clients.

When they see the looks of the happy clients and staff you are showing them a level they will want to reach for. Is there a picture of the big dog (that's YOU) smiling and shaking hands or hugging one of your best clients?

Are you giving out awards? Little plaques or trophies maybe? (If your bar association will let you?) That is a powerful technique.

Napoleon spoke about the incredible efforts a man will expend to win a blue ribbon. Likewise, once you subliminally communicate

what it takes to get your love and praise, now the person knows what to reach for.

The people getting a ribbon or plaque will be beyond the moon and their RAS will crank up to higher levels of noticing, going forward. And, the people seeing others getting a ribbon or plaque will recognize that there is a way to win precious recognition for helping their friends when they need a lawyer. *Recognition* is one of the most prized feelings and many have not felt it in years.

It's like setting up a Google Alert in their brain.

**STEP 6:** Establish the Referral Contract™ at Intake.

In a non-pushy, non-bossy way you can get your clients to agree to refer their loved ones and really mean it.

The best time to do it is at intake. You do not ask for referrals at intake. You do let your new client know that you and whole team are passionate about helping them and that includes the people they love and care about.

Get it? You are not asking for favours or invoking a quid pro quo. A referral is not for you. It's for the person who needs help that your client knows. Got it?

**You are extending additional benefits into that person's circle of friends and loved ones.** Now they are allowed to *share the protection and empowerment* they are getting through you—with the people they care about—right when they need it most.

And your client's brain will remain on high alert for opportunities to share that protection and empowerment, and to get those highly valued feelings of recognition and praise.

Here's how to word it: let them know that "any time a friend or loved one of yours has a legal challenge or question, get them to call me, okay?"

What are they going to say? They say yes of course. Then you say, "You'll do that for me?"—and pause. Then they'll say yes again. That's two yeses.

And then you tell them that they are your favorite type of client. Frankly, it's going to take all of us to push back against those insurance companies that would pay you nothing if they could get away with it.

Now you have a person who has made a commitment to help others, to "pay it forward". Let's call it a micro-commitment. It's something to build on, brick by brick.

### **STEP 7: Build the Referrer/Ambassador Identity.**

Now that they have committed to sending you cases, how can you *deepen* and *extend* that new commitment?

Through reinforcement of course.

Send a letter referencing your conversation and thanking them for being willing to be part of the movement. You may include a little pamphlet on how to do it and why to do it. You may share with them stories of other clients whose friend or loved one's rights were being trampled by an insurer and how you are fighting to right that wrong. You can also give them a gift, if that is allowed by your bar association. A little gift card is sometimes considered kosher.

Here again, you are using Social Proof to reinforce the desired behavior.

## Let's Tie It All Together in One Knot

When your clients see what kind of fun and joy, thanks, praise and appreciation are available to them, they will want it.

When they understand that helping their friends is the key to that kingdom, their RAS ratchets up another notch and **their brain never stops searching**. When you frame referrals not as a gift to you but as a contribution to the people they care about, it gives their brain a reason to be on the lookout.

Compare and contrast with right now. Are your client's brains programmed to perpetually search for cases for you? Do they associate referring their friends and associates and loved ones to pleasure and acknowledgment and appreciation—and contribution?

No?

Now you know **PRECISELY** why most of your clients will never refer... .. until and unless you install these strategies.

Take a look at your client continuum, from intake to disbursal and beyond. How many interactive events occur during the life of the case? What are the marketing and messaging implications and opportunities at each point of contact? And, how does the whole work together?

Referrals are “free or almost free” clients. Compared to paying for a zillion clicks to draw a confused and resistant stranger to you or to paying a third of your hard won fee to another lawyer, referrals are probably the best deal going in law firm marketing.

**Programming referrals is the highest ROI marketing there is.**

I humbly submit to you that Referrals should be the first priority in your marketing. You get *some* referrals already just by being as good as you are. So now, rather than sitting around hoping for more clients to spontaneously generate *noticing* and *willingness*—they won't!—you can take positive action and engineer referrals in surges.

Every time you stoke your clients' *noticing* and *willingness* you increase your odds. And, everybody you know knows 200-250 other people. Your clients do and your staff do as well.

Doesn't it just make sense to reach in there and pull some of those cases to yourself?

*Tom St. Louis has been working closely with personal injury lawyers on their marketing and client attraction strategies for over twenty years. Client nurture, referral engineering and sales strategy, scripting and training are all services available to the right law firm. To discuss working directly with Tom—call 613-604-2858 or send a message to: [moregreatcases@gmail.com](mailto:moregreatcases@gmail.com).*