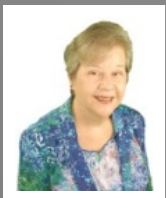




Business Development



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BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Business Development

Nurses come into legal nurse consulting from many starting points. Some have no experience in the field; others may be working in related fields or roles that fit within legal nurse consulting. Such nurses may not have applied the label of “legal nurse consulting” to their practice. For example, they could be doing risk management onsite evaluations of facilities, workers compensation case management, life care planning, or other roles.

Full Time or Part Time

Some nurses become burned out in their jobs, get tired of commuting, or dealing with the politics of nursing administration. They look at legal nurse consulting as the solution. Make no mistake about it – starting a business is *work!* But it is work of a different type.

Many nurses hold onto their full time jobs and begin a business part time. A lot of people will try to hang onto a clinical job where they’re working three days a week, or two days a week or maybe they’re working in the float pool and they try to do their business as a sideline. This model works for many nurses. No matter how you start your business, you have to say, “I’m committed to starting this business and therefore I’m going to invest my time, energy, and money into it.”

Others save money until they have enough to pay bills for six months, and then take the plunge and leave their full time jobs. This approach requires you to invest in your business and that means your time, your energy, and your money. Maybe it’s a matter of working really hard and working a lot of overtime in the beginning to save up some capital. Then you may get to that point where you say, “Today’s the deadline and today I’m actually going to do this for real. It’s going to be a make it or break it type situation.” You might need to take out a loan or find a family member who would help support you. That gives you a period of time to really commit to your business and really make a go of it.

Under this model, you will say to yourself, “Okay, I’m going to give it all I’ve got. I’ve got six months of income to do it and if all else fails I have another plan.” Make that commitment and jump in with both feet. Many people never get their LNC business off the ground because they’re busy working 36 hours a week at the hospital and halfway trying to build their business the other four days a week. It can be hard to market and make sales calls or return attorneys’ calls while working in a clinical role. Ultimately, it is difficult for part time business owners to invest as much into their business development as they do working the 36 hours a week for their employer. Can you create a situation where you invest more in your own business than you do in your employer’s business?

What Are Your Skills?

Anyone who wants to start or grow a business has to examine the motivation. What is your passion? What are you passionate about and why do you want to do start a legal nurse consulting business? What do you like to do with your spare time? Do you have certain skills that you’ve developed or learned that set you apart from someone else? What do other people say about you? How do they describe you? Do they describe you as a business person? Are you analytical? Are you detail oriented? Can you communicate well orally and in writing? I see these as prerequisites for success in legal nurse consulting.

Does your family encourage you in your business plan? Your family’s going to have to be able to support you - not necessarily financially but support your business endeavor so that you aren’t battling that at home while you’re trying to get this business off the ground. Roles and responsibilities have a way of changing when a family member is in business. Other family members may resist the changes.

If you’re a self-starter, if you can get along with different personalities, particularly if you’re good at making decisions, those things make you a good business owner. You also have to have the physical and emotional stamina to run a business because it’s a lot of work. The joke is “I work half a day, which 12 hours do I work?”

I met a father of four small boys at a time when my oldest son was about five. He said to me, “Oh, your husband owns his own business. That means he sets his own hours.” I said, “Yeah, let me tell you about it. He works from about 7:00 in the morning until 7:00 at night and every weekend and there’s nobody there to tell him to go home.” We went on and had a discussion, By the time I was done he was beginning to back away from me. He said, “Hmm, maybe there are some things that I hadn’t really considered.” Being self-employed requires a dedication and a hard-working philosophy that may be a surprise to people who are seeing it from the outside.

You have to have a strong drive, be able to define your personal needs and strengths and know your financial objectives. Do you want to get this business off the ground because you're interested in money? Is it flexibility you are after? Everyone's definition of success is different. Some people want to start their own business because they see a glossy ad stating they can make \$XXX an hour. Other people want to have the flexibility to be home with school-aged children. You have to define those priorities and then stay focused on those before you know if you're going to be cut out for business.

Define the Nature of Your Services

There are many business models for legal nurse consultants. Do you want to

- testify as an expert witness?
- be a non-testifying consultant?
- work on Medicare Set Aside allocations?
- be a case manager?
- supply expert witnesses?
- be a life care planner?

If you are open to different roles, you will find out what works; where you make the most money. As you get busy you narrow your focus. You concentrate on areas that are more lucrative so that the time invested in that particular area is more valuably spent.

Also be open to different types of cases. There are medical issues in criminal, toxic tort, product liability, pharmaceutical, and matrimonial cases. Many LNCs think exclusively in terms of medical and nursing malpractice and personal injury cases and overlook those other types of cases. Be open to the kinds of attorneys you will work with. I interviewed one nurse who wanted to work as my employee. She said, "I would never want to help plaintiff attorneys." She quickly realized that she could not take that position and work with me, since many of our clients are plaintiff attorneys.

When your work is diversified, this helps you better manage your business.

Foundations of Business

There are essential legal and financial components of starting any business.

Business Structure

Seek out an attorney who specializes in helping business startups. Learn about your choices of business structure, such as setting up an S corporation, C corporation or LLC (Limited Liability Company.) Time invested in exploring these options will help you select the right structure for your business.

Determine a name for your business that is not already in use in your state. (You can find out if the name you want is registered by checking with the Department of State in your state.) Select a name that is compelling and explains the services you have to offer. For example, suppose your name is John Bell and you provide legal nurse consulting services. “John Bell Consulting” does not provide your potential market with an understanding of what you offer. “Bell Legal Nurse Consulting” is a clearer alternative.

Once you have determined the name of the company, register it with the Department of State. Your business attorney or local county courthouse should be able to assist you with this, or you may be able to do it online.

Partnerships

Many people find having a business partner an appealing way to start a business. An attorney once described a partnership to me as a “marriage without the sex.” When a partnership works well, you are able to capitalize on each other’s strengths and experiences. Your harmony helps your business succeed. You pool your talents and your hard work combines to create a solid venture. You develop trust in each other. Your creativity creates a more solid company.

Partnerships do not always succeed. The impact can be like a divorce. They can fail for a variety of reasons, such as:

1. There is an inequitable amount of work or money invested in the company. One partner feels he or she is contributing a disproportionate amount of resources.
2. The life circumstances of one of the partners changes. A business venture is no longer possible or appealing.
3. The partners develop conflicts that cannot be resolved.

My only experience with a partner was not positive. We developed a conflict that we could not resolve. It cost me thousands of dollars in legal fees to separate from my partner. The legal fees swamped the profits of our business. In looking back at the painful lessons learned, I see a few things I should have done differently. The primary lesson was that I should have known my partner much better than I did

when I developed the relationship and plans for our business venture. There were personality issues that torpedoed our venture and doomed it before its start. I now stress that you should know your partner well before creating a company with that person.

Financial Structure

Seek a knowledgeable accountant to help you set up your financial structure. You should be aware of what records you need to keep, the taxes you need to pay, and how to best manage your money so you have a workable cash flow. Keep your personal money separate from your business money. For example, have a company credit card so you can easily track expenses. Consulting practices may have an ebb and flow of money but your need to pay rent and utilities is constant. One of the mantras of business owners is: “Businesses more frequently fail because of lack of cash flow than from lack of work.” Do not take on an expensive overhead in the beginning of your business before you can more accurately predict cash flow. Look for ways to economize, run the business out of your house, and get used furniture and office equipment. You can always upgrade when your business demands it and can fund it. My first desk was a board placed over two filing cabinets!

It is a good idea to periodically change accountants or have an outside accountant evaluate your business operations. That person may see something your primary accountant has missed.

Database

I wouldn't be able to run my businesses without a database. Also known as a relationship management system, your database is something that you will use in putting together information about your contacts. The one that we rely on in our office is called ACT! by Sage. It is easy to customize. It is designed to be able to keep track of all of our clients. It keeps track of all of the experts that we use in our business. It also keeps track of our vendors. We enter every case into ACT!

ACT! is for individuals and small business companies and a variety of industries. It's for people who want to organize their contact information, manage their daily responsibilities, and communicate more effectively to improve production. It's organized our business.

We set up groups in ACT! We have groups of expert witnesses; we have groups of attorney clients. We can use ACT! to do mailings to everybody in the group by having it connected through our e-mail system. We also set alarms to follow up on items. When we send out a case to an expert witness, we set an alarm for 3 weeks later to make sure that we contact that person and find out the status of the review.

And we have customized all of the fields to make sense for what we do. For example, we have a field that will identify the allegation in a case. It might be a medical malpractice case with an allegation of a failure to diagnose. We've got a drop down list that we've customized with the potential causes of action. We can find all of the cases in which there was a delay in diagnosis allegation or all of the car accident cases or all of the criminal cases. It's a very versatile program that has a lot of capability for customization.

A database puts all your vital information in one easy-to-access location. In one software program, there is every e-mail, every phone call, all the documents they sent you, complete to-do lists, meeting schedules, and reminders. It leaves no task undone. It allows you to make decisions in a more successful way to advance your relationships with your clients. When people call you and you look at that person's record, you know what the last e-mail said, or what your last conversation was. It really helps grow that personal business relationship.

There are other database program besides Act! There's one called Goldmine that is also contact relationship software. Daylite is one for Mac computer users. A good database integrates with your e-mails, correspondence, saves form letters, and has a place to keep notes. It helps you keep track of all your phone calls, calendars, any projects you're working on, and any opportunities that this client may offer you. You should be able to set up groups so you can quickly find information.

When I contact an attorney and we're talking about cases I will open up his record and flip through and say, "What happened to the Rogers case? What's going on with that?" Or the attorney will call me and say, "I don't know if you remember me," and I say, "Sure. We worked on the Rogers case in 2005." And he'll say, "Oh, you have such a good memory." And I'll say, "I have a database."

Are there substitutes for a database? In my opinion, no. If you are using a contact or address form, you are not using a relationship management system because you just can't keep track of your business relationships in that type of software, or in an Excel spreadsheet. It is the only method to effectively manage your business.

Business Card

You have established your legal and financial structure and invested in a database. You are now ready to design your business card. Your business card also is a way that you market your services. This is not a part of your business development where you should try to save pennies. For example, there are a number of business cards that you can purchase that are part of brochures, but they look home made. Carry your card by the dozens and always have them with you. Put them in your car, briefcase, wallet, or wherever you can grab them in a moment.

It is important to invest in a well-designed business card. Some people use the space on the back of the business card to list services, social media details, or QR Codes. Some people keep it blank in order to allow the person who receives the business card to take notes on the material. Here are some points to consider when designing a business card:

1. Make sure you don't have a glossy surface. It is very hard to write on.
2. Use white or off white paper. Dark paper will not scan well and also prevents the recipient from being able to make a note on it. Print on dark paper is also often hard to read.
3. Use a font large enough for older eyes to be able to decipher.
4. Be sure there is sufficient contrast between the paper and the ink.
5. Make sure it is easy to find the essential information, including your name, address, phone, fax and social media details.
6. Provide a bit of information to indicate what your business is about.
7. Have someone proofread your card. It has to be error free.

Email

Your email address should be professional and reflect your company name. Avoid cute names or those that clearly refer to another aspect of your life, such as adamsmom@hotmail.com.

Set up your signature lines to be automatically added to each message in your e-mail account. Your e-mail signature should include your complete name, educational degrees, phone number, city, and state. This will help your email recipients know what time zone you are in. Include your web address, social media addresses, and your tag line. Your tag line tells the services you provide, for example, legal nurse consulting services. Add your picture to your settings in your email. It creates a more personal feeling.

Your Professional Look

Your letterhead, business card, brochures and website should be designed to be consistent. The same logo, color scheme and look should carry through. Try to keep your font consistent throughout these items for uniformity. The masthead for your letterhead should be designed in a professional way and look consistent with your business card. If possible, look at the letterhead of your ideal clients and see if you can replicate that same type of professional feel. When I started Med League, I

noticed that most of the attorneys were using cream or off-white paper for their letterhead, so I used that type of paper for our letterhead. I used blue letters to provide a little bit of color. Blue is also a color that many people associate with truthfulness, and honesty, and calmness. By mirroring the clients that you're currently doing business with and wish to attract, you give the subliminal appearance that you're just like them. The cliché, "people like people that are like themselves" is appropriate for this example.

Website

Prospective clients will expect you to have a website. This address will appear on your business card and letterhead. Even if you just have a single, one-page, information site that lists your contact information and a list of services, it is imperative that you have some type of web presence. This subject is covered in depth in the next chapter.

Creating Your Brand

With so many legal nurse consultants vying for clients, how do you stand out? One of the ways is to clearly define your brand. First, you need to understand branding. Then you will learn how to use strategies to attract more *ideal* clients, not just more clients.

Branding Defined

Your brand actually equals your company's personality. It's what identifies a product or service or company. It's also an emotional connection and the positioning of a company. It's the promise that we trust and depend on in order to make buying decisions. Every day we make buying decisions based on brand promise.

Think of well-known brands. For example, Apple has a personality. They are very innovative; they are humanistic; and they are very in touch with the human experience of their products. Several years ago, when my 60 CD player broke, my son encouraged me to buy an iPod where I could store my 10,000 songs and easily retrieve them. Since then, I have bought more iPods, iPhones, an iPad and an iTouch. The products are exquisitely and thoughtfully marketed and packaged. The company consistently delivers an excellent service. The brand perception is the sum of all points of contact. When that's consistent, when it's strong, then people know what to expect and who to trust.

Branding is intangible, not just something you see but it's also something you can feel. It's the underlying power of our buying decisions and the reason we reach for certain products. We make buying decisions every day from the food that we eat to the tooth paste that we use.

Pay attention to the feelings, the descriptions, and the expectations are that you're creating for your clients. Your clients actually create your brand to some level; you just get it started. You influence the brand but your clients are the ones that define it to some level when they start interacting with it. You learn from their feedback in terms of what they like and do not like about your services.

Your Brand Identity

Your logo is just part of the brand. It's really a small aspect but it's the piece of your brand that everybody can remember. Your logo symbolizes the services and products you and how they solve your audience's problem. Consider hiring a graphic artist to work with you to create your logo. Do not copy someone else's logo – that is stealing. Your logo should look good in color or black and white. You will need a high resolution version of it so you can make it as large or small as needed.

Brand identity is defined by your visual aspects. It's the letterhead; the website; it's everything visual that you can touch and feel and see. Your visual identity is the look and the feel of the marketing materials, the website, the images that are used, or the colors that are carried throughout the website. The logo is just one piece of that.

Branding is consistent. Your logo, website, letterhead and business cards should all visually consistent. So no matter where or when a target member visits your website or touches your brand, they get a sense they've been there before; they've seen it before and then they can trust that brand experience a lot quicker.

Branding is shaped by the perceptions of the audience. That's done through the characteristics which we call brand attributes. It's also the emotional relatedness that we create. It's also the depth of that experience, or the brand promise. The fundamental idea behind having a brand is that everything a company does, everything it owns and everything it produces should reflect the value of the business as a whole. That's the purpose of branding.

Our brand allows our audience to instantly comprehend the value. When you have the consistency and you have it clearly identified, the intention of your brand is identified. People can comprehend it much faster than when you don't have it.

Especially in the legal nurse consulting industry you'll want to build immediate trust, credibility, knowledge and experience, and branding helps you take that to the new level.

What Branding is Not

A logo is not your brand but it is an instrumental part of it. Branding encompasses more than your logo. It's the logo design, the identity design along with all of your

marketing materials and your website. All of those different aspects combine in making your ultimate brand.

Branding is not just your identity. Branding is much bigger than that; it is the overall perceived mental, emotional end value of your business and/or personal image.

Brand Consistency and Repeat Business

How do legal nurse consultants effortlessly earn repeat business? The answers to that question is doing a great job for your clients, and having brand consistency. You need consistency because the point of that is, and why you get repeat business is, your clients know they can trust you. They expect the experience is going to be the same over and over and over. If they had a positive experience, they want to know that they can trust that and that it's going to happen again. That consistency is what convinces them that they can trust your services.

Brand loyalty is the same idea in a sense; more people are going to be loyal to that brand when they know they can trust it. They like it; they know it and it's going to keep them coming back.

Brand Standards

For example, suppose you supply nursing expert witnesses as we do at Med League. Our clients expect them to perform at a certain level of performance. Some of the most disturbing messages that I have to deal with as the president of the company are from attorneys who are unhappy with our experts. It may be that an expert that we supplied to the attorney is not functioning at the level we expect. The concern may be that the expert is not returning calls or the report wasn't prepared well, or it may be missing something major in the analysis. Each one of our experts is representing our brand. They affect the ability of every other expert in the business to potentially get work in the future from one of our clients.

When you think of branding, it's not just you who represents the brand. It is the consultants that you may have, or employees or contractors that you work with or any of that. It's every experience that the client has with your company.

When you deliver consulting services, you want to make sure that your standards are consistent and whether it's you or someone else. You've got to live by those standards so your clients will come back and that's what's going to create the repeat business. It's when your clients can't trust your brand anymore that they move on to your competitor.

Branding builds the immediate trust, likeability and the confidence in a company. You've got to be clear on what those standards are and that you are consistently

delivering on your brand promise. We cannot promise a quality product, and then turn in something filled with typos or errors.

Brand Touch Points

Touch points are everything you do, say or visually display. It's everything your company does or your business does, or your employees do. It's all of the correspondence, all of the marketing vehicles that you provide your audience, all of the points in which you interact with your clients. That's what you've got to keep consistent in order to earn repeat business.

Your touch points could be your:

- website
- card
- letterhead
- voice mail message
- newsletter
- contract
- work product
- email signature line
- employees
- social media messages
- exhibiting banner
- brochures
- presentations
- signs
- packaging
- blog
- proposal

- videos

Stop and think through every single touch point you use. Is there anything that needs to be re-evaluated? Is there anything that's not quite aligned with your brand or you don't have your logo on it or it looks different for some reason? Evaluate all those areas and you'll find whether or not it's being consistent and it's standing up to the standards that you have.

Attracting Ideal Clients

First, understand your ideal clients. We work well, for example, with small to mid sized plaintiff firms that do not employ legal nurse consultants on staff. Our ideal clients are in our state, do medical malpractice and personal injury work, and understand the value a legal nurse consultant brings to their practice. We do not work well with attorneys who want work done at the last minute, have unreasonable demands, restrictive practices, and are slow in paying their bills.

The bottom line is the more clear you are on your brand promise and the experience and everybody experiences that truth at every touch point, the more they will come back. Make sure that every single thing, every touch point, every marketing item, all of it is in sync and you're communicating that clearly through all of your communications and touch points as well.

Brand Equity

We build brand equity when we are consistent in how we interact with our clients during our touch points. It makes people feel good about working with you; it makes people trust you and creates the repeat business.

Understand the difference between the value of a known brand and an unknown brand. In a nutshell, consumers pay a lot more for a similar product if the brand is known versus an unknown brand. For example, think brand name versus generic when you buy over-the-counter medicines. When are you willing to pay more for the brand name?

You want your clients to stay with you because you have built up equity. They have had positive experiences with you as a legal nurse consultant; you want them to not consider using another consultant.

Brand equity equals the value benefit received, less the price paid. So it's that difference that creates that equity in your brand and in your business. When your clients have a negative experience with you, that creates some negative brand equity. You can come back from it; you can bounce back from it. You can try to clean up the relationship, offer them a solution, but you may never regain that trust again.

Once you create your brand, once you discover it, once you have it in place, it's not something that you just put to rest. It's something that you manage; it's something that you pay attention to. Your reputation as a legal nurse consultant and consulting firm is crucial. You can come up with a new campaign that might introduce your services to a different target audience, but you definitely have to manage it. It's a reputation that you have to maintain.

Pay attention to your touch points. Consider how what you deliver as part of your brand, and work to continuously improve your services.

Resources

Michael Michalowicz, *The Toilet Paper Entrepreneur*, Obsidian Launch

Lee Salz and Jeb Blunt, *Business Expert Guide to Small Business Success*, Business Expert Publishing

This material comes from Building Blocks for a Successful Legal Nurse Consulting Practice. [Order it at this link. http://patiyer.com/products/building-blocks-for-a-successful-legal-nurse-consulting-practice/](http://patiyer.com/products/building-blocks-for-a-successful-legal-nurse-consulting-practice/)

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