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BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS BUILDS LAW PRACTICES

How to use social media to build your business brand

More learned members of the bar emphasize the need for young attorneys to build relationships. These relationships with others include fellow attorneys, community leaders, business owners and executives. Once established, these relationships often produce lasting referral sources where attorneys provide legal services and earn a living. Many young attorneys often dismiss this clever advice as a relic of the past no longer necessary to a successful private law practice. For those of us – myself included! – who once dismissed the advice of our more senior mentors, this advice is now more relevant than ever.

In December 2016, I took a course on personal branding. Two young entrepreneurs, Whitney Warne and Emily Steele of Brand Launch and several other business endeavors, offered a two-day course on how we as individuals present ourselves and how others perceive us. I took the course because I found both Warne and Steele thought-provoking and hoped to see how they each built their businesses.

For me, the thought of personal branding felt contrived. I imagined the course would show me a way to have a “business brand” and that felt so inauthentic to who I am. There is not a whole lot of difference between me as a person and me as a lawyer. Sure, I am a tad more serious as a lawyer than I am in my personal life, but I still find humor essential to both my law practice and my personal life. Regardless, I imagined the experience would prove painful, but I hoped to learn more about business-building and less about personal branding.

For two long days, I collaborated with small business owners in the greater Des Moines area and discussed how they built their businesses, why they built their businesses and how we could all produce more revenue with client success as our first priority. As the only attorney in the course, I learned many practical skills from Warne, Steele and my classmates. These lessons led us each to determine what being authentic meant to us. Authentic not in our different roles in life, but

authentic as a unified being where our personal and work lives combined. To describe the process as painful is an understatement, but the lessons learned during those two very long days prove the more senior attorneys among us are right – we must build relationships.

Building relationships is simple, right? For most of us, not so much. Especially not when a lot of my time is spent drafting documents, meeting with clients, advocating in courtrooms, mentoring young law students and tending to my dog Lyla’s needs. For anyone who knows Lyla, her expectations remain higher than most. Nonetheless, attorneys with years of experience still make time to build relationships, and they often have the added work of managing cases, associate attorneys, law firms and, most importantly, being part of their own families and communities.

As young attorneys, we do not need to spend thousands of dollars on marketing gimmicks or buy-one-get-one-free divorce packages. Instead, we must utilize something our elder lawyers did not have: social media. Again, you do not need to spend thousands of dollars on advertisements and wait for the phones to ring. It is much simpler than that: show up! That is it. Nothing more, nothing less. Now, showing up is simple but it takes work. Quite a lot of work.

How to show up means many things to many people. There is not one way to show up. I use social media to show up in my social groups. On whichever social media platforms you utilize, find events

By Tyler L. Coe



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for things that interest you. Gardening? Animal rescue groups? Chess clubs? If the topic interests you, show up. Note, though, if you select a random group where you have zero actual interest, showing up will not work. Your mere presence is not enough. You must truly have interest in whatever you decide to become part of when you show up. This will become your community.

For me, I have a deep interest in mental health issues. I serve on a statewide board where the organization advocates for youth and educators concerning mental health. When I hear about a mental-health-related event, discussion, or fundraiser, I show up. I personally appear, make new acquaintances and often find new friends.

Now, I fully understand the frustration of attending an event where I do not know anyone. The whole purpose of my attending an event is not for me, but for whatever the event supports. I attend these events because I care about mental health. I want better resources for Iowa's youth and educators. Those are the reasons I show up – I care. I take these new connections a step ahead. I make a social media post about the event. I do not make it about my law practice, my firm or myself.

Of course, my firm routinely supports causes dear to my heart and I give credit where credit is due; however, my firm and I support causes because we care about our community and not because we want a chance to mention ourselves. This is one of the most important reasons building relationships for young lawyers fail; we make our in-person presence about ourselves and our social media posts about ourselves. When we advocate for whatever cause or interest we have individually, people notice. People see us championing our support of mental health advocacy, our love of dogs named Lyla and our support for local entrepreneurs. Demonstrating our authenticity and consistency is key to building relationships.

For some attorneys, merging our personal lives and our professional lives causes consternation. It should not. All I do is live and present myself authentically. I show the world my support of others and causes close to my heart by showing up in person and on social media. Again, I do not advertise myself or focus attention on my legal practice. I just show the true me – a guy who finds divorce and family law fun, a devoted dog dad and a supporter of mental

BUILDING YOUR PERSONAL BRAND

By Emily Steele and Whitney Warne, *Brand Launch*

Your personal brand is how you make people feel, and in a day and age where people are plugged into social media more than ever before, the potential to make an impact is tremendous.

Brand Launch offers extensive training for people to build a powerful personal brand by focusing on key elements such as: building community online, how to effectively engage your audience, why you must think about differentiating yourself as a person (sorry, but your beautiful logo won't cut it!), and becoming top of mind for your genius zone.

People are constantly making decisions about who to do business with and who to refer people to, especially lawyers. By having a consistent, authentic online and offline presence, you can be top of mind to generate business and keep strong referrals coming in without investing hundreds or thousands of dollars on marketing and advertising.

Personal branding allows you to release the expectation of sharing your credentials, long articles about your industry or client testimonials. Instead, the personal branding approach is about humanizing yourself and showing your community what you value, how you show up and what you care about. Those simple connection points are what draw people to you and what will differentiate you from everyone else.

It's showing the fundraising event you recently attended. It's sharing how you fuel up in the morning and where you get your morning coffee or workout in. It's photos of your dog, your baby, your grandma, your house renovation. It's commenting on your friends' updates and adding value to their life. It's showing up for people and asking nothing in return. You can start doing those things immediately upon reading this and you'll start seeing new connection points and conversations start to blossom.

After a decade investing in personal branding strategies and tactics, Brand Launch now offers online courses and other digital products to help people make the impact they desire. Learn more at www.brandlaunch.site.

health. Of course, there is a lot more to me than those items, but people in the community get to see the real me.

I wrote above that all you have to do is show up. That remains true; however, you must show up consistently. You cannot attend a couple of events during the course of one year and hope the phones ring. That does not work. You show up when you can, you commit yourself to what interests you and you post about it on social media. These are just the basics of the wisdom behind showing up, but they work.

I estimate the time showing up in person and on social media will take at least two years before you get a single client. Why? Because you are not marketing yourself to those individuals within your clubs, groups or causes. You are not marketing at all. Being a lawyer is a small piece of your identity, but big enough to where those people you meet refer their friends, family members and colleagues to you when they are in a time of need. For me, I can count on a few hands the times a Facebook friend has personally asked for my help. I cannot, however, begin to count the number of times a new friend, acquaintance or Facebook friend has sent a potential client my way.

When I ask people why they send potential clients my way, they often tell me it is because of my authenticity. They want to send people they care about to someone who is real. They want an attorney who is part of the community. Remember community means any group of people, not the greater communities where we reside. These communities are full of people who want to help each other. Our communities are great places to help others. Just like our elder mentors, I build relationships.



Tyler Coe is an attorney with Whitfield & Eddy Law. While his foremost love is Lyla, his Beagle, Coe's next love is the practice of law. He practices in the area of divorce and family law. If you have questions or would like to discuss this article, please contact him at **515-246-5523** or **coe@whitfieldlaw.com**.