

Register for the upcoming Accelerated Growth Collaborative Law workshop in the Sydney 30th March 2009 at <https://secure4.ilisys.com.au/collai/>

Ten Tips for Growing your Family Law and Collaborative Law Practice
By Elizabeth Ferris

Many family lawyers have been trained in collaborative practice and see the value of offering clients another option to resolving disputes. An option that can help separating and divorcing clients to resolve disputes in a potentially less destructive manner.

Collaborative Law is not for all clients and it is not the responsibility of the lawyer to “sell” collaborative to their clients, however, many clients are not aware this option exists and do not know how collaborative law could benefit them and their families. As a result, lawyers who have been trained in collaborative are frustrated about the low demand for collaborative law. In my consultation with lawyers and law firms, I often hear, “I want to do more collaborative cases, but my clients are not asking for it.” or “My clients want collaborative law, but their spouse selected a solicitor who does not do collaborative law.”

The less clients and referral sources understand the value of collaborative law, the less demand there will be for collaborative law. This means that lawyers who want to attract more collaborative clients to their practice will need to implement new strategies for growing their collaborative law practice.

The lawyers I have worked with have told me the challenges they face in “marketing” their practice include. First, they are lawyers, not marketers. Secondly, they are too busy with chargeable hour requirements and client demands to proactively write and execute a marketing plan. Third, they lose interest in doing an activity that does not come natural to them or they do not like. Because of these reasons, many lawyers believe growing a collaborative practice may be outside their control.

In my experience working with lawyers and law firms in the UK and North America, I have witnessed the characteristics of successful practitioners and have consulted with lawyers who went from few or no collaborative cases to a significant increase in cases in a 6-12 month time frame.

So, how do you grow a practice that brings value to your clients, fulfillment to your work and is financially profitable? The following are ten tips on the do’s and don’ts of growing your collaborative law practice to help get you started:

1. **Define a Clear Vision** — Don’t begin practice growth activities or tasks without a clear vision of what you want your practice to look like. To reach a destination, you must first have one. The clearer you are about what you want to achieve, the more likely you will carry out your plan.

2. **Identify Your Best Clients** — Do understand who your ideal clients are and proactively attract these clients to your practice. One of the best ways you can accelerate the growth of your practice is to focus your marketing efforts on the select few who will bring you the maximum return on your time and financial investment. Be clear on who your best clients are, the problems you can solve for these clients and how you are attracting them to your practice.
3. **Define your Core Message** — Don't convey an "all things to all people" message about your practice. Do identify what differentiates you and consistently communicate what you do so others understand the value of your services.
4. **Clarify what your Practice Stands For** — Do build on the foundation of your vision, best clients, and core message to create a "brand" for your practice that consistently conveys who you are, who you serve and the value you provide clients.
5. **Create a Plan** — Don't embark on random or reactive "tasks" without first creating a road map that gives you direction on where you are going. Do create a plan that is realistic, measurable, and focuses on the most important activities. Specify what strategies and tactics you will use to achieve your goal.
6. **Maximize the Internet for Attracting New Clients** — Do have a web site that clearly communicates your "brand" and offers high value educational resources to your clients. Don't allow your web site to become dated. Do assure you are visible on the search engines.
7. **Network with Targeted Referral Sources** — Don't allow the day to day demands of client work to prevent you from consistently developing relationships with referral sources. The networking you do today will result in new client work in months to come. Your goal is to stay "top of mind" with key referral sources and professionals in your community.
8. **Provide an Exceptional Client Experience** — Do focus on creating an optimal client experience. Use client evaluations and debrief clients after meetings to learn how your client is experiencing the process. Don't ever stop learning, mentoring and seeking new and better ways to deliver exceptional value to your clients.

9. **Educate the Public** – Do include in your plan strategies for increasing the visibility of your practice in your community. Write articles in your local publications speak at local and regional association meetings; contact the press about human interest stories and innovative approaches to helping clients.

10. **Know your purpose for doing all of the above** — Do have clarity on “why” you want to grow your collaborative practice. Use this sense of purpose to help you to reach outside your comfort zone to execute the activities required to help achieve your most important goals.

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Do spend a day learning “what works” to grow your collaborative practice. Don’t allow yourself to begin 2009 without a road map for how you are going to build a practice that brings values to clients, fulfillment to your work and is financially profitable.

Please email Elizabeth Ferris at eferris@ferrisconsult.com for more information on the workshop. For more tips on growing your practice, go to www.ferrisconsult.com and click on Accelerated Growth Blog.