

Confucius became one of the earliest career coaches when he said, "Choose a job you love and you will never have to work a day in your life." Most attorneys enter the profession fueled by a passion for justice and the law but somewhere along the way a job can shift from joy to feeling like hard work.

To transform your practice into a job you love, consider a modern twist on the wisdom of Confucius. Try pursuing your off-the-clock interests to develop your practice. Focusing on activities and hobbies that energize you — hiking, travel, music, surfing, writing, whatever puts a smile on your face — can attract quality clients, the kind you will enjoy representing.

Spending time with cool clients is just one of the reasons that regularly propels labor and employment attorney Ben Gipson of Winston & Strawn away from the office and on to hiking trails and mountains across the country.

A lifelong outdoor and adventure enthusiast, Gipson never consciously connected business development to his love of a rigorous trek. As his fraternity of outdoor compatriots grew, and his connections and conversations expanded, he found himself attending the Outdoor Industry Association's annual meetings.

The members of this powerful trade association are Gipson's ideal clients. He easily speaks "their language" and literally walks their walks. He's been able to distinguish himself among like-minded colleagues as one of the few lawyers who happily participates in the group's physically demanding service projects.

"Seeing an attorney sweaty and covered in grime counters most people's perception of a typical lawyer. People take notice, which allows me to connect with them on a meaningful level," said Gipson. Nontraditional marketing activities, such as fundraising for Big City Mountaineers, are a perfect fit for him and Gipson is grateful that his firm supports his style of client development.

It's not necessary to let people see you sweat to turn your hobbies into productive networking and business opportunities. But it does help if you aren't perceived as pushing a business agenda too blatantly during everyone's good times. Making the transition from recreational buddy to prospective client does require subtlety and patience.

"There's no magic time when a friend becomes a referral source. You'll know when the time is right and when it is, if you are really good, it is okay to ask for the business," according to Miles J. Feldman, an entertainment litigation partner at Liner Grode Stein Yankelevitz Sunshine Regenstreif & Taylor.

Feldman's lifelong love of music led him to form the rock group, The Wannabins. He credits his pro bono band gigs and fundraisers with bringing in substantial new business to his practice and raising his profile in the community.

His other passion — surfing — spurred him to be one of the founding members of the Association of Surfing Lawyers, an interest which led to new business, but not immediately.

He recalls that after years of catching waves with a friend, who was an executive at an action sports/entertainment company, the right time to ask for a referral to the general counsel finally appeared. His patience and timing, both key elements in surfing, paid off. Feldman's request was met with enthusiasm and a warm introduction.

Joining a sport, association or affinity group with the express purpose of asking for business is not likely to yield the desired result or make you popular. Your passion and interest should be genuine and your motiva-

tion true. A lack of authenticity is easily detectable and will get you rejected by people who are there for the love of it.

"One of my passions is music and I notice that there are many attorneys who are frustrated artists who love music and the arts," said Elizabeth Watson, a land use and real estate partner at Greenberg Glusker. At a recent program presented by the Legal Marketing Association's Los Angeles Chapter on networking while you play, Watson spoke about her successful business development strategy centered around her love of music and the city of New Orleans.

Watson organizes annual outings to the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival and invites local real estate professionals from across Southern California to join her and her husband. The city's bohemie and high-profile land use issues create a natural and relaxed way for the attorney to soak up Cajun culture and shine as an expert in her practice area without trying too hard.

"It's always easier to talk about someone else other than yourself, so I try to suggest other services people might need or ways I can help them," explained Watson.

In the art of attracting new clients, focusing on what you can give others, rather than what you can take, is how the most productive business builders succeed. Being helpful and giving, or acting as a "fixer" for sophisticated clients, as Barry H. Lawrence, Of Counsel at Kaye Scholer describes himself, is how he blends his skill at closing deals with his passion for talking to people.

Convinced there's something interesting about everyone, Lawrence credits his conversational gifts and personal commitment to getting the job done appropriately with allowing him to sustain and enjoy a 45-year legal career.

Sustaining a long, happy career is much easier when your dreams and your job intersect. And while most attorneys may find mountaineering lawyer Gipson's dream of "taking a meeting at the top of Mount Rainier" a bit extreme, there are less strenuous ways to build a practice around your interests.

There's the experience of a withdrawn but brilliant law firm associate whose lack of a client pipeline dampened her future at the firm. With a bit of coaching, she learned to parlay her passion for the theatre into a seat on the board of directors of a new theater company.

Not only did the associate help draft the fledgling group's bylaws but she also regularly invites clients to the theater she supports. The best news of all — she loves every minute of her involvement.

Granted, every day at work won't be as thrilling as a trip to Disneyland. But by introducing your personal passions, interests and hobbies into your work life, you might create surprising opportunities to grow your practice to a whole new level and quite possibly find yourself in a job you love.

Amy Spach, principal of AS Written Communication, loves her job. She writes custom Web content, articles and marketing copy for law firms and attorneys. She can be contacted at www.aswrittencom.com or (323) 876-6374.



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