

public relations

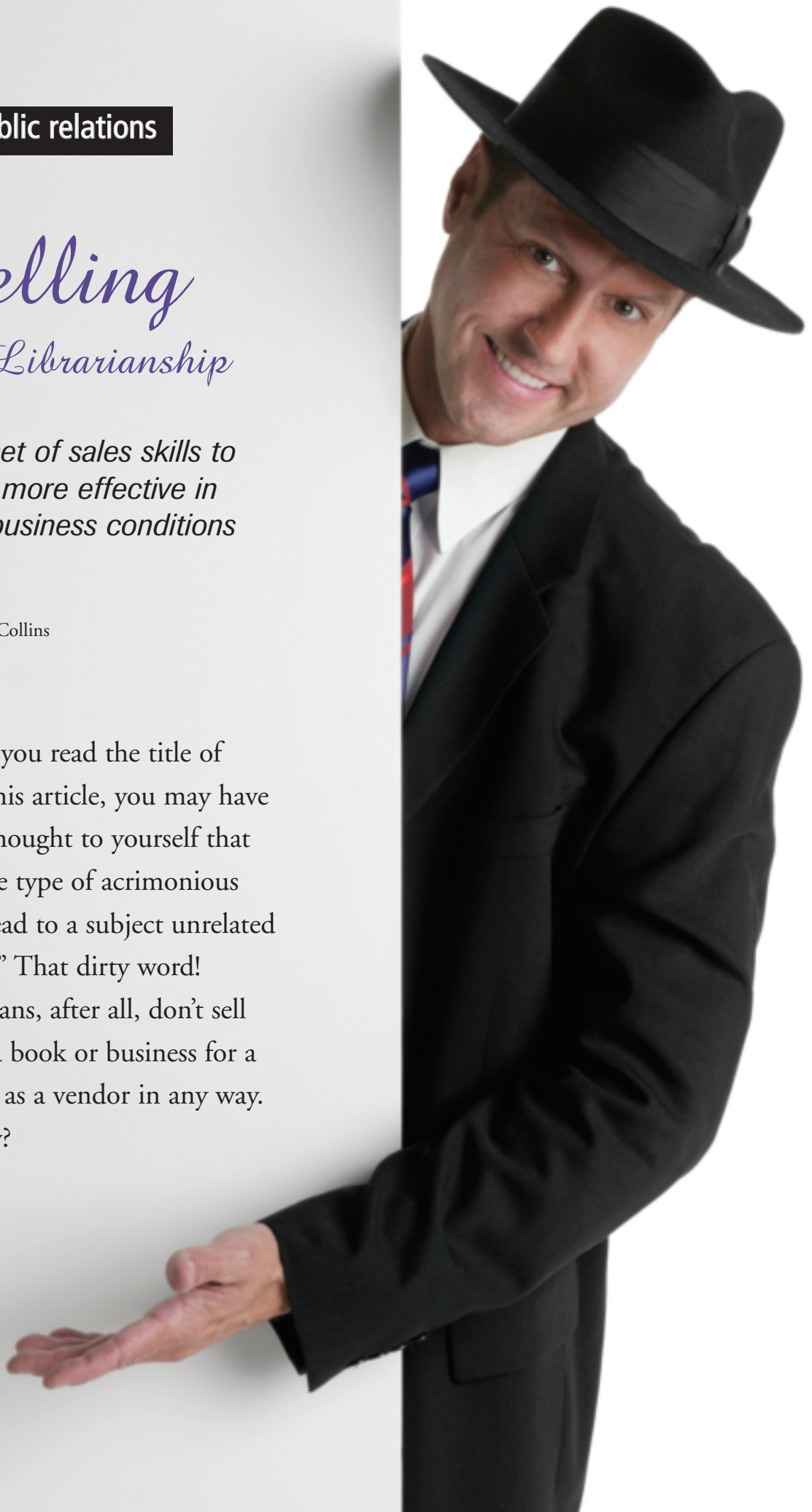
# *Selling*

## *Law Librarianship*

*Build a set of sales skills to become more effective in today's business conditions*

by Kristine L. Collins

**A**s you read the title of this article, you may have thought to yourself that this is some type of acrimonious joke or a lead to a subject unrelated to “selling.” That dirty word! Law librarians, after all, don’t sell or deliver a book or business for a firm or act as a vendor in any way. Or do they?



As firms move toward and hit the \$1 billion mark, they appear to be—for all practical purposes—real corporate structures. That corporate structure in America has a long-standing reputation for financially responsible behavior that requires setting economic goals. The expectation is set on specific dollar amounts, and falling short of those amounts brings a host of unhappy board members and shareholders. The necessity to acquire a set of skills directed at achieving those goals has everyone being able to “sell” themselves, whether externally or internally.

Times they are a changin’—don’t you feel the pressure from your side of the desk in a law library? Many times librarians are unsure of what service it is that they provide, and, once they understand what that is, they wonder if they will provide the service adequately. The thought of selling yourself has, unfortunately, been tagged with a negative meaning. However, in relation to the current environment, it is a necessity. How do you begin to build a set of skills that will arm you to become more effective in today’s business conditions? The following criteria will help that process.

### Personal Development Skills

When you are asked for your assistance, do you act like you are doing the internal client (partner, associate, staff) a favor? Since the essence of the library is its academic isolation, a librarian is likely to feel comfortable within that space.

Here are some skills that are easy to implement to move you outside of that comfort zone, but they require practice to acquire as a habit pattern. They can improve the atmosphere within a firm almost instantly.

**Always smile when you answer the phone.** You can sense the positive energy over the phone lines, and it extends the fact that you are energetic about your service.

**Keep a mirror near the phone.** Check your reactions and keep tabs on your expressions during phone interactions.

**Discipline yourself to react in a positive manner** to your own staff members. The exercise will be contagious.

**Ask three other people their impressions of your interactions.** It is necessary for the individuals to be comfortable with telling you their perceptions. It may surprise you to see how others perceive you in the workplace.

### The Internal Client

It is almost your entire responsibility to provide the library services to a partner, associate, or supporting staff member. There

are many obstacles in accomplishing that in today’s environment, as opposed to 20 years ago. How do you deal with the barriers that prevent these clients from accessing you and the plethora of information available?

**Communicate one application or service a week.** Use graphics to get users’ attention. Keep the rotation going because the squeaky wheel gets the grease. Most of all, keep the communiqué very short because, as you all know, attorneys don’t like to read or be spammed with e-mails. Remind associates of library services that are not electronic. Use this to push your very necessary library agenda.

**Target about 10 attorneys at a time for a small campaign**—perhaps with the help of your marketing department. Use short messages to communicate services

specific to particular practice groups. This will encourage them to stroll over to your area or access the information on the firm’s intranet.

**Find a champion within a practice group to introduce a library service.**

Ask him or her to tell three people about it. I was recently told by a firm librarian that the firm had 500 applications on its intranet. For that type of investment by the firm, there should be an ongoing drive to get users to access this information. Remember, if what you are doing is not working, you need to change it up.

**Dedicate a set time of 20 minutes each week to fulfill the above activities (without fail).** It will make a difference.

### Dealing with Emotional Interactions and the Internal Client

Any interaction with people is ultimately going to spell out your success or failure in a situation. Law firms are special environments with cultures specific to each one. Emotions run high there because success and failure are clearly defined. Either you are an attorney or not—it is black and white.

Unfortunately, the judgment runs throughout the firm, and many times it is a contentious climate as opposed to a more neutral one. You can exercise some control over this if you learn some selling techniques.

**Mitigate angry behavior toward you or the library.** The individuals who are constantly angry or hostile towards you are likely just angry in general. Understanding human behavior outside of your sphere is mandatory to your performance role. Before you respond to a situation, take a deep breath and consider the following:

- They receive pressure from clients and/or other senior partners to succeed at all costs. It matters if they win or lose.
- They may have personal problems unrelated to work, but do not have the skills or ability to set those aside.
- They are all-around unhappy individuals. Nothing will make them happy.

The way to deal with these types of clients is not to mirror their behavior. Of course you should be respected, but if you exhibit an attitude of sarcasm or disgust, you only feed into their behavior toward you and your staff. If they attack you personally with onslaughts, I recommend using some of

the following phrases in a calm voice:

- “Can you help me understand your request better?”
- “Is there any way I can help you \_\_\_\_\_?”
- “Could you let me know how I could improve \_\_\_\_ for you?”

Remember, at this angry, upset, frustrated point in time, they are not thinking about your feelings or how you should react to them short of genuflecting. The key is to *turn it around on them*. By remaining calm and using non-threatening phrases, a normal person will be embarrassed by his or her behavior in the long run.

If the situation is abnormally hostile, I recommend you approach the individual at a later time with a question such as, “I know our last meeting was tense, I want you to know that I would like your input on how I might improve that situation so it would have a more favorable outcome.” Again, if you make it about you or your feelings or your “anything,” you will lose the interaction and negotiation.

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## Selling Back to Vendors

The first reaction to vendors is generally one of disdain and contempt, which is somewhat understandable.

That never gets anyone anywhere because a law firm requires a list of services from a list of providers.

There is also the issue of learning what new products and applications are available in the marketplace. New products frequently dictate an advantage to the firm. As opposed to the lack of negotiating tactics, some effective techniques to use in negotiations or discourse are the following.

“ **If the vendor is credible, there will be a negotiation and an effort to bring a resolution favorable to both sides of the table.** ”

**If you are not interested in a product or service, tell the individual, “no thank you,” at the onset.** There is no point in wasting your time or the vendor’s time.

**If you are interested in a product or service, use the same selling methods the sales person is using.**

One of the biggest complaints from librarians is that the vendors are a nuisance. Be direct with them about what you are looking for.

If this is not communicated effectively, you will not get what you want.

**If there is a specific issue, like price, terms in the contract, etc., be clear and precise about those.** Otherwise you will

continue to get phone calls every week. Everything you get or don’t get is up to you and your ability to communicate the issue or request.

**Be specific and direct with what is best for the firm and your department.** If the vendor is credible, there will be a negotiation and an effort to bring a resolution favorable to both sides of the table.

All of these techniques are applicable to many situations. Selling is a highly developed skill that takes years to develop. Use these to your advantage and see the environment change around you as you become the new star within your firm. Shine brightly! ■

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