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# Report

June 2005

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2005



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The Cincinnati Bar Association, founded in 1872, is an Ohio not-for-profit corporation, the members of which are attorneys principally practicing in Hamilton County, Ohio. Its mission is to maintain the highest professional standards among attorneys, to enhance the professional competence of attorneys, to improve the administration of justice, to serve the needs of members, and to provide law-related service and education to the public.

Cincinnati Bar Association

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# Random Acts of Lunch

by Margo Pierce

How many times have you gone to lunch with a client, prospective client or a professional with whom you'd like to work and walked away feeling it was a waste of your time? Imagine how the other person felt and the kind of impression that left. A few simple steps could have transformed the disappointing encounter into a golden opportunity, according to Mark Maraia. He says it begins with a basic idea.

"Making relationships more important in your practice," Maraia says, "means you treat people in a certain way. You treat them well and you generate good will."

A practicing attorney, Mark Maraia started his coaching and training firm, Maraia & Associates, Inc., 15 years ago with the intent to help lawyers develop the practical "people skills" necessary to be successful in the profession. He uses the phrase "random acts of lunch" to underscore the everyday challenges attorneys face when trying to integrate the business of relationships with the practice of law and cultivating new business.

He points out that most people have never been taught to prepare for a relationship-building meeting, such as a lunch, so they don't know how to integrate what they know into that experience.

Maraia notes that putting the needs and concerns of other people first seems like common sense; you can only work with a client to provide a service when a need is identified. His experience indicates that most attorneys know this. However, the pressure to bring in new clients and increase business with those already on a retainer is so great that most lawyers tend to talk about the specialties and services of the firm as a means to tempt clients before they even know what's needed.

"What are you learning when you're talking?" Maraia asks his clients in training sessions and when coaching executives. The response is universal: nothing. The disconnection between the behavior of talking and the knowledge about the power of listening is obvious to many but few can identify the reason for the gap.

"Here's a blinding flash of the

obvious," Maraia says. "Relating information to your life and applying it means relying on what you know first, then jumping in with something new."

He points out that most people have never been taught to prepare for a relationship-building meeting, such as a lunch, so they don't know how to integrate what they know into that experience. Maraia teaches a simple way for people to put the relationship first by relying on what the attorney already knows so that it's an easy and painless process.

"First, do your homework," Maraia says.

Being current on what's happening with your clients makes it clear that you are interested in them and their needs. He suggests reviewing the client's file as a means for becoming familiar with the history and the most recent activities. Then, he says, tapping into a variety of resources can provide more information about a company. A few possibilities are:

- Read the company's website
- Contact the company's marketing department to get current materials
- Research their Standard & Poor's Directory or Dun & Bradstreet listings
- Pull and read articles on the company from LexisNexis or Westlaw/Dialog
- Check with peers and support staff within the firm to see if they know anyone in the company or have heard anything of interest
- Check Value Line reports that focus on the industry
- Review industry and trade publications

Once the attorney's personal experiences are combined with a fundamental corporate knowledge, its position within its market space, recent success, current challenges and other essential data, it's time to sit down and prepare for the lunch. Maraia says these three simple steps translate the factual information into a practical, actionable plan for the lunch.

- Determine what your client or prospective client needs. (CEO, big picture; operations, client's division)
- Identify three or four questions, being specific about things you'd like to know. (This shifts your mindset to your client, away from what you want.)



Margo Pierce is a freelance writer in Cincinnati and provides a variety of business writing services including features, web copy and ghostwriting: [www.writerdiva.com](http://www.writerdiva.com).

- Write down possible outcomes you'd like to see happen. (Outcome is a commitment to take action within a specific time frame.)

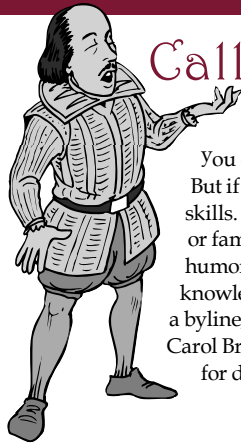
Armed with this information, Maraia says your next business lunch can be a resounding success. Your client feels as though her attorney is truly interested in her success and concerns and is perceived as a partner trying to help her achieve her goals. She is more willing to engage in conversation and share helpful information than when she feels she's being "sold."

Through this process, attorneys can learn firsthand how to merge their own knowledge and experience with meeting preparation in order to orchestrate a successful outcome resulting in a positive change in their behavior. Maraia describes this as an ongoing process and directs his clients to continue their success by conducting a debriefing after each meeting. According to his experience, this is an essential step in the learning and execution process.

"Between knowing a fact and doing something different is an execution gap," Maraia says. "Being consciously aware of a fact, then making a choice and knowing why you are doing it results in change. Making sure that you do it consistently makes the new behavior into a habit."

Sitting down after the lunch in order to compare what happened against the planned objectives creates an opportunity to learn what went well and how to handle things differently the next time. It also reinforces the specific steps necessary for follow-up later.

With 90 percent of his clients coming from the ranks of the legal profession, Maraia says he knows this approach works and can eradicate random acts of lunch from anyone's schedule. ■



## Calling All Literary Lawyers

You don't have to be William Shakespeare to write for the *CBA Report*. But if you possess even a little of the bard's talents, we want your skills. Put pen to paper and explore a legal topic you are interested in or familiar with. Submissions accepted include practice area articles, humor columns, personal perspectives, even opinion pieces. Share your knowledge with others in the legal community. Not only will you get a byline, you could also earn CLE credit for your contribution. Contact Carol Branch, *CBA Report* editor, at (513) 699-1391 or [cjbranch@cincybar.org](mailto:cjbranch@cincybar.org) for details. And get writing!

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