



# YOU HAVE ONLY 120 HOURS A YEAR FOR BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT. HERE'S WHAT YOU SHOULD FOCUS ON...

**By Sue-Ella Prodonovich**

I did some maths recently and discovered something that may frighten you. Once the billable hours, professional development sessions, admin work and people management were out of the way, a typical lawyer, business consultant or other time-keeping professional had only 120 hours a year to spend on business development (BD).

That's right. You have less than three weeks of the time you'd spend in the office each week - considerably less if you work in a big firm ;)

So, when it comes to doing your BD and growing your practice, you simply won't have time to do everything. You have to be selective.

With that in mind, I think you should take a couple of your precious 120 hours to map out how you're going to spend the rest of them over the next year. (Oops, we're now down to 118).

And here are seven things I think you should focus on when you do.

## 1. FOCUS ON YOUR PRACTICE

I'd love to be able to give you a formula for how to allocate your 120 hours. However, there really is no 'one size fits all' way to do it.

I can't tell you to spend 40 hours here and 20 hours there because every practice is different. We're at different stages of our careers. Our networks are different, and so are the dynamics within our sectors. The way we win work can be different too.

What I can suggest, however, is that you begin by looking at where your practice is at right now and where you want it to get to.

What work are you doing, and what would you like to do more of? This is the foundation of all business development success.

## 2. FOCUS ON YOUR (GOOD) CLIENTS

The next thing I want you to do is to look at your BD infrastructure. By this, I generally mean your referral networks, clients, systems and marketing support.



I think we should be routinely checking our 'balance', and this is as good a time as any to do it. That means analysing which clients we're currently working with and who we're still in touch with. We should also look at who our key referrers and intermediaries are and what kind of work they send us. We should also take into account which clients we're pursuing and which dormant clients are in our 'win back' box.

My advice is to reserve quite a bit of your 120 hours for these guys. Other than your staff, they are your greatest assets, so think about how you can keep them happy.

I also think you should go even one step further and get all Marie Kondo on those clients that don't make the grade.

That's right. As productivity expert Oliver Burkeman recommends (2022) pick where you will strategically under-engage.

### 3. FOCUS ON YOUR STRENGTHS

It's always great to break new ground, but I think the best BD work is usually done from within our comfort zones. We should focus on our strengths and use these to our advantage rather than trying to compensate for our weaknesses.

So to figure out how you're going to spend your time, take a detailed look at where your work has come from over the past few years. Look to replicate and repeat what works for you. Look at the clients you've worked on over the past 24 months and how the best clients came to your door.

Is there something you can replicate – is there a referral activity you should prioritise?

### 4. FOCUS ON YOUR WORKLOAD

We're often told that, when it comes to BD, we need to make that daily client call, write our weekly blog or host a monthly professional development session just to keep ourselves in the habit.

I disagree.

Most professionals have periods where they're completely swamped by work and then periods where they're relatively quiet. The litigator has a big hearing that finally settles. The M&A specialist has a deal that's over. The auditor has the 30 September filing, and then the work eases up (well, a bit).

When you're flat out, focus on getting through your workload and delivering a great experience to the client, then allocate time in less busy periods to BD.

I know, I know. Some of you will be saying that if you don't do something every day, or every week, it won't get done at all.



I'd respond by saying that trying to squeeze even more into your already-packed schedule will kill you (or at least make you miserable).

So, for instance, use the downtimes for idea generation (your input). Draft a batch of article ideas or research the next seminar you'll be hosting so that you don't have to squeeze it into the busier times. Your output (posts to a website or sharing with contacts) can then be executed with help from your marketers - or marketing tech - with consistent cadence.

Rather than thinking a little BD every day, think campaigns. That means you can do shorter, sharper bursts of business development, followed by periods where you focus on getting the work done.

## 5. FOCUS ON YOUR RHYTHMS

Not all hours of the day, week, month or year were created equal. Each of us is better at different things at different times. So [focus on your own rhythms](#) when you're allocating what to do and when.

A lot of us find we're better at ploughing through stuff in the mornings rather than in the afternoons. So, if you're scheduling phone calls for BD, don't sacrifice this time. Use it for your work and make your calls in the afternoon.

At the same time, if you find yourself more creative in the late afternoon, use this time for your brainstorming or idea generation. Don't force yourself to be creative first thing in the morning at a time that doesn't suit you.

I'm a big fan of scheduling BD hours for when you're actually going to be good at it, not when getting through it will be like trying to swim through sand.

[You can read more about the concept of working to your rhythms in Dan Pink's great book, \*When\* \(2023\)](#)

## 6. FOCUS ON MULTI-TASKING

I think we should always look for multiple benefits in everything we do. When we have such limited time to get your BD done, I think it becomes imperative. So look at how you can leverage your time and get BD done when you're doing other things too.

Professional development is an obvious one - just invite your clients or referrers along. But think about other times too.

For instance, are there situations where you connect your clients to others for mutual benefit? Do you have any social events planned where you could bring a client along?

## 7. FOCUS ON A PLAN

Finally, while it can be fun sometimes to just wing it and see what happens, it's a terrible idea for BD. A scattergun approach rarely works. You need to know what you're working



towards and then have a plan for how to get there. [So spend at least three of your 120 hours building out a proper BD plan.](#)

But don't throw in everything and the kitchen sink or make it too gruelling. Make your plan easy to stick to and flexible enough to change as circumstances do.

And, most importantly, if you want a bit of help, go for a walk with your BD person and pick their brain.

[Or, log in to BD45 and pick mine!](#)

If you'd like to know more about how to build a successful practice, [get in touch.](#)

## REFERENCES, TOOLS, AND FURTHER READING

Burkeman, O (2021) [4,000 Weeks: Time and How To Use It](#), Penguin, Audio and book

Pink, D (2023) [When: The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing](#) (book)

Urban T (2014) [Your Life in Weeks, Wait, But Why?](#) (blog)

[BD45: Business Development Ideas in 45-minutes.](#)

### Related articles by Sue-Ella

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(2022) [Six Ways to Tackle Your BD Plan](#)

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Sue-Ella is the Principal of [Prodonovich Advisory](#), a business dedicated to helping professional services practices sharpen their business development practices.

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