



BD Baggage: A Series



Diane M. Costigan is a partner and head of the coaching practice at SJL Shannon LLC, a legal talent management and professional development consulting firm.



BD•Baggage

/bēdēbagij/

n.

1. an underlying resistance or obstacle getting in the way of setting and/or moving forward with business development goals
"I can't because of my BD Baggage"
2. past experiences or long-held ideas regarded as burdens and impediments to developing client relationships
"the BD baggage I'm hauling around"

SJL SHANNON
LEGAL TALENT MANAGEMENT



1 What's Your BD Baggage?

It's my first meeting with John, a mid-career M&A partner at a major law firm and an excellent technical lawyer. Since becoming a partner, he's developed a modest amount of business and supports his practice group leader on servicing one of the firm's institutional clients – a client that now comes to him directly for certain transactions.

“So, what brings you to business development coaching?” I ask him. John becomes visibly upset. His shoulders rise up to meet his ears at the same time he puts both hands on either side of his head grabbing big chunks of hair while he stares down at the conference room table. He tells me he feels “resentful,” “exhausted” and “deflated.” I implore him to share more about what's been going on. This is what he says:

- **His salary has been flat for 3 years.** While John is well-regarded at his firm and his total hours have been steadily going up each year, the numbers that are being tracked for his compensation (ex: specifically his “responsible attorney” credits) are staying flat.
- **He's over-extended with respect to non-billable activities.** At this point, he's on three committees: the Recruiting Committee, the Associates Committee, and the Mentoring Committee. He's also the Professional Development Partner for his group and, in addition to being formally assigned to mentor three associates, has found himself serving as an informal mentor to 3 others.
- **There's never enough time.** Between his practice, firm citizenship responsibilities, his two-hour round-trip commute and his recent acceptance of a leadership position on the board of a finance related non-profit organization – which he joined to boost his business development activities –, it feels like there are just too few hours in the day.

- **He can't seem to say "no."** John has tried to say no to some of these different responsibilities, but when he did he was told by his firm that because his "responsible attorney" hours were lower than expected, it would be "a good idea" to supplement with firm citizenship time.
- **He has parental guilt.** All of this is compounded by this persistent and overwhelming feeling of guilt that he isn't more involved in his teenage children's lives. One is in the process of applying to college, and the other has been struggling with an ADHD diagnosis. He knows they would benefit from more of his time and his being more "present" when they're together.
- **He's experiencing marital stress.** John's spouse is also a partner in a major law firm who has a similar transactional practice. Between the hours they both work, it often feels like they're ships passing in the night.
- **He's suffering from a major energy shortage.** As a result of all of the above, he feels completely stuck in his current situation, is having trouble sleeping, isn't exercising, nor devoting any time to his own self-care.

"John" isn't a specific, or even a singular, case, but in fact a fictitious amalgam of the dozens and dozens of law firm partners (both men and women) we've coached over the years with respect to business development. More often than not, partners are clear on what they need to do, but, nonetheless, something is holding them back such that they struggle to take action and to move the needle forward. Sometimes, they can be in a state of feeling overwhelmed or disengaged such that they can't even get to the goal-setting stage. In either case, we call this "BD Baggage."

When coaching partners who express some of these struggles, the focus of the engagement cannot be entirely on sales and marketing skills and strategy, as one might expect. For John, before we can tackle the technical aspects of increasing "responsible attorney credits" by some percent, we need to unpack this baggage and put all the items back safely and neatly where they belong. For him, that means spending time to help him: a) feel healthier and happier, b) free up time in his calendar and c) increase his engagement and motivation.

When you acknowledge and address your “BD Baggage,” your business development journey can go much more smoothly and efficiently. Join us on the upcoming posts in this “BD Baggage” blog series as we define, diagnose, unpack and eliminate what might be weighing down your business development efforts.

2 BD Baggage Defined

Let's get granular.

What exactly is “BD Baggage”? Effectively, it is any underlying resistance or obstacle that is getting in the way of moving forward with business development goals. “BD Baggage” may be directly related to business development itself. For example, partners may:

- Have a less than helpful mindset around or orientation to business development.
- Have a significant fear of or anxiety around business development.
- Have a lack of confidence around their skills as a lawyer or a business developer.
- Lack the motivation to do it.

Often, however, “BD Baggage” is not related to business development at all. For example, it could involve:

- Time management issues ranging from over-commitment to challenges with prioritization to procrastination.
- Stress management challenges that are getting in the way of engaging in business development activities or getting optimal results when they do.
- Lack of effective communication skills such as asking for support or clarification when needed or saying “no.”
- More political savvy like needing to repair an internal relationship with someone who could have an important impact on their business development efforts.
- Better people management skills such as delegation or giving constructive feedback to underperforming associates in the absence of which they have less time and energy to focus on business development.

And, of course, “BD Baggage” can be, and often is, a combination of two or more of these challenges.

Let’s go back to John who was mentioned in the last blogpost. John had several pieces of “BD Baggage.” From a business development and marketing standpoint, John had solid technical skills and he also had the overall confidence to engage in business development. Deficiencies in either of those categories can be a serious impediment to successful business development. Thankfully, however, that wasn’t John’s issue. He had some good contacts he had been able to convert to clients; he had become a trusted advisor for several institutional clients; and he was a strong networker when he was able to get out to events. That, combined with the fact that he was a highly skilled technical lawyer, can be a solid script for business development success. And yet, John was struggling to increase his results and his compensation was suffering.

Where John was getting stuck and the key sources of his “BD Baggage” centered on low energy and low engagement. On the engagement side, he was disappointed in his compensation, particularly in light of how much he had been working over the past few years. He had become overcommitted and burnt out. What’s worse, he felt trapped by his non-billable commitments because they were impeding his ability to get out and sell. He had become increasingly resentful because he was afraid to let go of the non-billable commitments for fear that his compensation would go down and felt the time he was already spending at the office kept him from seeing his family. He wasn’t willing to divert more time away from them to invest in the business development efforts he knew might help turn his situation around. His low engagement, not surprisingly, went hand in hand with his low supply of energy. Even when he was able to find the time to engage in business development activities, he could barely muster up the energy to make an impact. In short, he felt hopeless about his situation and it had basically immobilized his business development efforts.

Does John’s story strike a chord? Are there aspects you can relate to? Stay tuned to the next post in this blog series (7 Signs That You Might be Carrying “BD Baggage”) to find out if **you** have “BD Baggage.”

3 7 Signs You're Carrying BD Baggage

So, how do you know if you might have some BD Baggage weighing down your attempts to reach your business development goals? BD Baggage can come in many shapes, sizes, colors and even patterns. Over the years, we've trained ourselves to uncover the signs of BD Baggage as early as possible so we can direct our coaching time, energy and attention accordingly to free up any resistance and blocks. This resistance-clearing helps our coachees move on to the more technical strategies that can pave the way for success. Here are some potential warning signals that can alert you to the possibility that you're carrying around some BD Baggage.

1. **You set business development goals but you never seem to take action towards them.** As in, last year's business plan is sitting in a file folder somewhere gathering dust...
2. **You avoid setting business development goals or set underwhelming ones.** If your idea of a business development goal is "continuing your business development efforts," this one applies to you.
3. **You find that despite your best intentions, the time you set aside for business development activities gets compromised in lieu of billable projects or non-work priorities.** Something else "urgent" but possibly not "important" always seems to come up and business development activities are always the first things to go.
4. **You find you don't have or don't take steps to create space in your calendar for business development activities.** There is no standing block of time: not weekly, monthly or even quarterly that you've set aside for business-related activities.

5. You feel drained by or even resentful about having to do business development activities. It takes a lot of energy to motivate yourself to do BD-related things.

6. You avoid difficult conversations around getting credit for your BD efforts internally. For example, you did the majority of the work for a pitch on which you will likely be the lead but the colleague who had the loose connection to the client takes the majority of the credit and you don't say anything.

7. You've found yourself saying one of the below statements or something similar:

- "I didn't go to law school to be a sales person."
- "I don't feel comfortable asking my friends to give me business."
- "I feel like I'm bothering people when I ask them out to lunch."
- "If I just put my head down, do good work and keep X partner happy, I'll be safe."
- "I just want to do enough so that my compensation doesn't drop."
- "I'll never be the next big rainmaker at this firm."
- "Business development just isn't my thing. It doesn't come naturally to me."
- "Any client I'd try to bring in to the firm would be small and isn't a client the firm cares about developing."
- "Any client I'd try to bring in to the firm would never pay our rates."
- "I don't really believe I have anything to offer that's different than the competition."
- "I'm an introvert and I'm not good at cocktail parties."

If you've identified with some of the signs of "BD Baggage," fear not. The good news is you're not alone! Be kind to yourself about it. Beating yourself up will only compound the resistance. And guess what? Knowledge is power. If you know that you have BD Baggage that's getting in the way of your success, and you're willing to take steps to remove it, you can easily be on your way to smoother sailing.

So let's get on our way with shedding that psychological weight. The next post will give you ideas about how to start the process of eliminating your baggage.

4 Identifying Your Specific BD Baggage

Ok, so now you know you have BD Baggage. But how do you know what kind? Here are some questions to help bring to the surface some possible source(s) of resistance:

- When you think about writing a business plan or setting goals, how do you feel?
- What thoughts come up when you go to set up a meeting or call with a contact?
- What runs through your mind when you think about going to a networking event, speaking at a conference or writing an article? How do you feel about going on pitches?

When you set a specific goal and yet fail to take any action to achieve it, or when you consciously or subconsciously sabotage your efforts to move closer to that goal, a few things could be at play.

To discover what those things are, we need to dig deeper. Why? Because somewhere, underneath, is the root cause of your resistance, and it's essential that we identify what that is. Here are some of the most common themes we see:

- **You don't really want your goal in the first place.** That might be because you truly just don't want to develop business or you think you "should" want your goal or it was a target set for you by someone else.
- **You've set your goal but you're not really willing to do what you'd need to do to reach it.** For example, you want to increase your originations by 10% but you don't want to make outreach calls, speak at certain conferences, etc.
- **You either consciously or subconsciously don't believe your goal is possible.** Perhaps you don't really believe your contacts will ever give you business. Or, you don't really believe any clients will pay your rates.
- **You do want your goal but you have significant fear around it.** The four common types of fear that come up around business development are:

- Fear of failure: The fear that you won't reach your goals and there will be consequences like a decrease in compensation.
- Fear of rejection: The fear that you will put yourself out there, make yourself vulnerable to a client or potential client and the answer will be no.
- Performance anxiety: The fear that you will give a speech, go to a pitch, etc. and it will be a total disaster.
- Fear of success: This is a sneaky one because it seems counterintuitive and yet it can often be the most pernicious cause of resistance out there. The fear that you will be successful and as a result there will be unsavory consequences. For example, success might mean you will get more work when you already feel like you are drowning in the work you have.

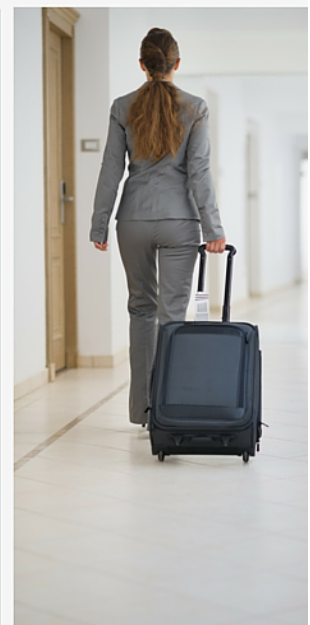
Getting clear on your specific BD Baggage and the underlying reasons for it is an important step for setting yourself up for success with overcoming the resistance that is getting in your way. Stay tuned for the next post in the series to learn strategies to address your baggage.



#1 Fear of **Rejection**

It's a foregone conclusion that, in the business development process, people are often going to say no. Lighten your load by acknowledging that business development is less about convincing someone to do what they aren't predisposed to do and more about matching needs to capabilities. If there isn't a match, it doesn't mean you failed; often, it just means the opportunity wasn't right.

SJL SHANNON
LEGAL TALENT MANAGEMENT



5 Addressing Your BD Baggage

Confronting BD baggage typically needs to happen on two fronts. First, whether your baggage is directly related to business development (like a lack of confidence in your marketing skills) or something unrelated (like compromised time management skills), there are concrete steps you will need to take to correct the problem. We call these the “tactical/practical” steps. For example, you may need to get some additional training to build up your confidence or you may need to read some books on time management and, in both cases, practice some new strategies.

In the case of John from the first post, we spent about half of our coaching time on the “tactical/practical” front. We helped him do an audit of all of his non-billable activities mapped to the ROI he got from each which led him to the conclusion that he really needed to get off of at least two committees. In order to get support from his practice group leader on that so that he wasn’t penalized, he put together a compelling business plan that highlighted where he was going to redirect his time and attention and what he predicted might come of it. He also started making micro-changes to his schedule where he was able to get some light exercise (like doing walking meetings with some of his mentees and clients plus a once a week family bike ride) and we recommended a stress reduction app that helped him get more sleep. These new strategies helped him feel more energized and he felt more hopeful about his situation which improved his overall engagement.

The second front happens more on the “energetic” level and involves your motivation and mindset. In other words, what is going for you on the mental and emotional level that needs to be cleared in order for you to be successful? Here are some general steps to help get you started that can help address the energetic side of the BD baggage equation:

- **Revisit and recalibrate your goals:** Particularly if motivation is a challenge for you, step back and revisit your goals. Are they specific enough? Are they realistic? If they seem unattainable, you may need to scale them back. In John's case, he was given a target number but it seemed unrealistic to him. We broke it down a bit to see how many deals that might entail which helped the number seem more manageable. Then we talked about steps he would have to take with more numbers (ex: number of meetings, phone calls, conferences) and that too seemed more doable.
- **Clarify your motivation:** What's the benefit to you? Will bringing in business give you great autonomy over your schedule? Will it make you less dependent on others? Will it ensure job security? For John, even though on one level he was motivated by salary increase he also realized he was motivated by having his identity be tied to being good at business development. He leveraged these two factors whenever he felt his baggage coming up to block his progress.
- **Challenge assumptions and limiting beliefs:** When a partner tells me they will never be the next rain maker at their firm, I believe them because that's what they believe. And then we start the process of really testing their hypothesis. Is it really true? Is only part of it true? Is there any evidence to the contrary? John's big assumption which was weighing him down was that his situation was hopeless. Once the tactical/practical steps started to produce results he was able to see that wasn't true.
- **Reframe your perspective:** To the extent a negative mindset is part of your BD Baggage, can you reframe your thoughts to be more positive and helpful? Is there an opportunity for growth? Instead of having to "ask" people for work, is it possible you are "offering" something of value? Can business development be fun or pleasurable? For John, it became all about the "turnaround" story. He realized that if he could navigate himself out of this dark time in his career, it would be a huge exercise in resilience that he could continue to build on.

- **Positive inquiry:** Instead of focusing on what's not working, shift attention to what is. Which clients and contacts are taking your calls? Which colleagues are inviting you to pitches? What speeches did go well? The more you can celebrate the wins along the way, the more positive energy you can bring to your efforts.

In the end, John was able to get his turnaround story replete with a modest salary increase and more quality time with his family. Unpacking and working through his BD baggage enabled him to execute on a strategic business development plan and solid marketing skills. He still works to keep his baggage in check, but his attachment to his positive outcomes keeps him motivated.

Thanks for joining us on this series. We hope it gave you a framework to identify and address any potential BD baggage to help optimize success with your business development goals.