

# Monetizing Your Children and Pets to Grow Your Law Practice

By Stephen E. Seckler

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A few weeks ago, my wife and I had a “guest dog” staying with us. We were once proud dog owners. But that ended in 2017, just before our last child went off to college and our 14-year-old yellow Lab died (Q: When does life begin in the Jewish tradition? A: When the dog dies and the kids go off to college.)

Right now, we are actually living in my mother-in-law's apartment in Brookline, Massachusetts, while we do some home renovations. It's a much more urban environment than our home in Newton, and we don't know many of the neighbors here in Brookline. We've been here since December.

In the five days that Buttons was with us (yes, that's the name of the adorable Australian Labradoodle that we hosted), I spoke to more people than I have in five months. I met people in the park whom I would never have spoken to. We had several occasions to chat. I spoke to people in the elevator I had never met.

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It was a great reminder that dogs are a very effective social lubricant (*If* you happen to like dogs—see my article [“Do What You Love \(or at Least “Like”\) and the Work Will Follow”](#)).

We'll be leaving Brookline shortly, and Buttons is long gone, so I won't be walking him in the park again. But if Buttons were still with us (“who's a good boy?”), I know that I would begin to cultivate relationships with other dog owners (or just dog lovers) I see in the neighborhood. And maybe some of them would turn out to be lawyers who need my help, or lawyers or other professionals who know lawyers who are frustrated with their marketing, with their careers, or want to develop better leadership skills.

I'm actually not that big a dog lover, and when we had Chutney, our yellow Lab, I wouldn't say that he was a big source of social connection for me. Where Chutney made a difference, however, was when I was standing on the sidelines watching my kids play soccer or dropping my kids off at play dates with Chutney in tow.

For me, having kids was a great way to cultivate business relationships.

In fact, some of my best clients ended up being the parents of my kids' friends.

There are many ways to be successful in building a law practice. Fundamentally, it is important to choose activities that you enjoy and that feel authentic. And it is important to choose activities that give you the opportunity to build relationships with potential clients and referral sources.

If you happen to have children and you show up at a lot of their activities or if you have a dog and you spend time at dog parks, these are powerful tools in your marketing arsenal that are just waiting to be activated.

Relationship building is really at the core of business development success. So, finding authentic and enjoyable ways to build relationships with prospective clients and referral sources is really the key.

I'm not suggesting that you go to dog parks or hang out at youth sports only looking for opportunities to hand out your business cards. Quite the contrary. Go to the little league game and enjoy watching your kids play. Sit in the audience at the dance recital and clap as loud as you can! But make the effort to talk to other parents. Find out what they do. Listen for ways that you can be helpful to them. If and when the time seems right, see if you can find an opportunity to get together with them (i.e., after the game or recital) to talk business. Same with trips to the dog park.

I have clients I met when our kids were in middle school. It wasn't until they were in high school that I actually began doing some marketing and career coaching with them. I focused on getting to know them on the sidelines, at school events, and at social gatherings. I didn't pitch. Over time, they got to know, like, and trust me, and eventually, that turned into paying work.

One of my current clients is a trusts and estates lawyer who has two adorable young children and a cute Boston terrier. Her target market is "developing net worth" families (i.e., professionals just like her who are just starting a family—and maybe have a pet!). I keep encouraging her to go to the dog park and get to know people in the neighborhood. I'm sure that will help her grow her practice over time.

If you participate in kid activities or hang out at dog parks simply trying to pitch your services, that is sure to backfire. When you are selling legal services, you are selling trust. Going right for the "kill" is no way to build trust.

But if you genuinely enjoy watching your kids play youth sports and perform at recitals, or if you enjoy seeing your dog and someone else's dog chase the same ball, then don't miss the chance to have conversations with the parents (of the kids and/or of the dogs). It's an organic way to grow your network, and it's highly effective as long as you give it time!

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