

# Shock and Awe at LSSO: Sales Training Doesn't Work and Diversity Doesn't Matter

By Larry Bodine

The word "surprised" isn't adequate to describe how I felt when I heard the statements at the LSSO (Legal Sales and Service Organization) Raindance Conference in Reston, VA. Somehow "shock and awe," describing the sky on fire in Baghdad, fit better.

**Diversity Doesn't Matter.** Three general counsel at the "General Counsels Unplugged: Everything You wanted to Know" session all agreed that ethnic, gender and racial makeup of law firms doesn't matter in deciding which firms their companies hire.

The general counsel were:

- **Julie Alexa Strauss**, VP and Corporate Counsel for **Feld Entertainment, Inc.**, of Tysons Corner, VA. The company produces live family entertainment (Ringling Brothers Circus and Disney on Ice). They have 4 in-house lawyers.
- **Neal S. Winneg**, GC of Upromise, Inc., an online college savings program. It is a subsidiary of **Sallie May**, which has 26 lawyers in house.
- **Simone Wu**, acting GC and VP at **XO Communications**, a Reston, VA, telecom services and broadband access company. It has 25 lawyers in-house. It spends \$6 million on legal matters, from revenues of \$1.5 billion. **Astonishingly, Wu is Asian, and she agreed that diversity doesn't matter to her company when selecting a law firm.**



Simone Wu

Stunned attendees speculated that the companies involved were small, and **not major national law firms where diversity definitely does matter.** How else can you explain educated people saying stupid things in public?

**The next stunner** came during the "Defining Business Development" session, where **Sue Stock Allison** of the Brand Research Company and **Katherine Daisley**, Marketing Manager for ALM Research, presented the findings of the new "**Law Firm Business Development Survey.**"

## Factors contributing to firm's growth

- Client Relationship Development
- Strategic Marketing
- Increase in Billing Rates
- Lateral Hires
- Industry Specialization
- Cost-cutting
- Acquisitions
- Sales Training – **LEAST EFFECTIVE**

They surveyed 157 law firm marketing directors and CMOs from November 2005 to January 2006, who told them that **sales training for the lawyers was the least effective factor contributing to the firm's revenue growth.**

Patrick B. Sweeney of Sales Results Inc. in Arlington, VA, stood up at the front of the audience and said this could only be true if there is **a lack of buy-in from top management.**

I could also picture a room of bored partners, pretending to pay attention to an outside sales training consultant, and waiting to go back to billing hours. **Without followup and without requiring the partners to compose personal sales plans, of course the training would be ineffective.**

Meanwhile, "**cost cutting**" somehow got on the list of as a growth factor. It made me realize that even though I was at a conference of sophisticated sales and business development professionals, **there is a flat world out there populated by law firms that simply don't "get it."**

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