



OBITUARY: THE COFFEE CATCH-UP

BY SUE-ELLA PRODONOVICH

The pain, suffering and devastation caused by COVID-19 has been well documented. And, while Australia and New Zealand has come through the pandemic relatively well, I feel for my colleagues in other parts of the world where this wretched virus has upended lives.

But let's focus for a moment on the positives that have come out of the last year, such as working from home, better work/life balance, greater flexibility and an increased emphasis on wellbeing. And I'd like to add another one to that list: the death of the coffee catch up.

THE COFFEE CATCH-UP: THE LAZY PROFESSIONAL'S PREFERRED BD

In pre-pandemic times, the coffee catch-up was the default lawyers and accountants reached for when they wanted to show they were doing something about developing their business. They could ink into their diaries that they caught up with X client or Y referrer, thereby proving to the firm that they were taking practice development seriously and pulling their weight compared to others in the firm.

It didn't help that some firms held the frequency of coffee catch-ups as a measure of BD worth.

Don't get me wrong. I'm a huge fan of getting out from behind the desk. But my view is that so little came out of most coffee catch-ups they were pointless. The conversations were often so banal they were like the famous scene from *The Castle* where Dale Kerrigan visits his brother, Wayne, in prison:

Wayne: How's Mum?

Dale: Good.

Wayne: How's Dad?

Dale: Good.

Wayne: How's Trace?

Dale: Good.

Wayne: How are you?

Dale: Good.

Wayne: How's Steve?

Dale: He's all right.

Wayne: Good.

Dale [voice-over]: We could just chat for hours.

Yep, we've all been there. Scratching our heads, wondering what to say next and sitting in awkward silence, just praying for the meeting to end.

Really, both us and the person we were having coffee with would have been much better served remaining behind our desks and getting on with our work rather than engaging in this kind of nonsense. It wasn't effective business development, it wasn't achieving anything. We weren't connecting anyone, advancing our or their business, or learning anything we didn't know. It was just wasting everyone's time and leaving us hepped up on caffeine in the process.

NO TIME FOR COFFEE ON ZOOM

Fortunately, COVID-19 made the coffee catch up impossible for a while. Then, when things started getting back to normal, many people came to the realisation that they weren't getting much out of this whole ritual, nor were they enjoying it that much.

Catching up face-to-face has become a big step, even a last resort - one that many professionals now only use when they really have to. If COVID has taught us anything, it's that life's too short and our time too precious to spend on these things.

A BETTER WAY TO KEEP UP RELATIONSHIPS IN A POST-COVID WORLD

With that in mind, I thought it was worth looking at five things you should be doing to develop your practice in today's business world rather than simply meeting someone for a coffee.

- 1. Keep up the soft communication.** Keep the online seminars going, keep the newsletters flowing. Keep providing your clients with something of value that helps them do their job better. Not only do publishing and speaking let people know you're still there, they also provide you with the opportunity to show off your expertise in a practical way.
- 2. Schedule a phone or Zoom call.** If you really want to catch up, just pick up the phone or do it via Zoom.
- 3. Scrap the sales pitch.** I've already written that the [Rainmaker was dead](#) but so is the sales pitch. Genuine is in. Pitches are so pre-COVID.
- 4. Use client feedback.** I can't stress this one enough. [Find out how you can help clients](#) by engaging in proper conversations, not coffee-based chit chat.
- 5. Keep doing a good job.** Nothing impresses people more than ability in today's business world. Competence is the new black.

[Read more about the new rules for business in a post-COVID world](#)

AND IF YOU DO HAVE TO CATCH UP...

If you really can't live without the coffee catch-up, do it in an effective and planned way. Be systematic (but not scripted).

Think about the benefit your coffee companion will derive from the experience and if the ideas you kick-around excite you both, or the rapport is strong, then go ahead.

Go in with an agenda and, even better still, consider sharing that agenda with your client or referrer before you meet. That way you won't be catching anyone off guard and they'll have time to prepare from their end too.

IN SHORT...

I'm officially declaring the coffee catch up-dead. COVID-19 has changed the rules of business and the way we're winning work. In its place is competence, authenticity and a healthy respect for other people's time.

WANT MORE?

As always, if you'd like to know more, get in touch.

FURTHER READING

[The Castle \(1997\)](#) - selected by the Australian public as its favourite film (2011) and the greatest Australian Film ever ! (2018).

[Why Good Work is Still Your Best BD](#) (Sept 2020)

WANT MORE?

If you'd like help with building the skills and smarts of your team email [Sue-Ella](#) or [get in touch](#).



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