

QUICK GUIDE

THE PROFESSIONAL FRIENDSHIP TOUCHPOINT LADDER

Know where you are.
Know what's next.

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Introducing the concept

Most people think BD is about knowing the right people. It's not - or at least, that's only part of it.

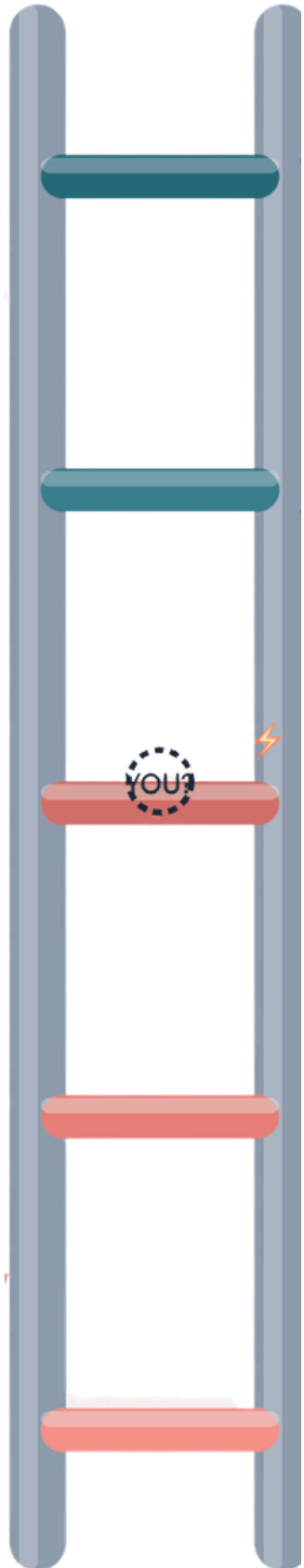
The harder question is: are your relationships actually conversion-ready?

The Touchpoint Ladder came out of a pattern we kept seeing in our training sessions. People had good networks. Strong relationships. But they weren't converting, because they were going for the work before the relationship was ready – not because of a bad relationship, but because of a missing rung.

This framework gives you a way to look at any relationship and ask a more useful question than "should I ask?" - it helps you ask: where does this relationship actually stand?



The professional friendship touchpoint ladder



5 Comfort

Your consistent value means a commercial conversation feels like a natural next step - not a pitch. This is earned, not asked for. But comfort is not passive - neglect it and the ladder works in both directions.

4 Trust

Regular, relevant touchpoints, even small ones, signal that you understand their world and are paying attention. This is where tailored follow-up and demonstrating you've listened starts to matter most.

A common mistake at this stage is moving to the solution before you've fully understood the problem. Earn the right to sell by staying curious a little longer.

3 Professional relevance

They see your expertise as potentially useful to them. This is where BD momentum usually begins, and where surfacing a need or an external trigger can accelerate the climb significantly.

2 Professional visibility

They know who you are as a person but haven't yet connected you to a professional need. Often the gap between social warmth and professional relevance.

1 Awareness

They know who you are as a person. You have interacted socially or in a community setting.

↑ CONVERSION ZONE ↓

The goal is always the next rung. The top is where the work comes from.

01 Awareness

They know who you are.

You've interacted socially, or in a community or industry context. You exist in each other's world.

Examples of how this happens:

- Met at an event
- Mutual friends or colleagues
- Interact occasionally – at the school gate, in a LinkedIn comment thread, at a regular industry gathering

What to do at this level: Don't overthink it. Just make sure you're visible in the places where the right people are. Show up consistently. The goal here isn't to impress – it's to exist.

02 Professional visibility

They know what you do.

But you'd be surprised how many warm contacts never get this far – they only know the social version of you. "Sarah from football." "Alex from university." But visibility alone doesn't convert. This rung gets you in the game: rung 3 is where it starts to matter.

Examples of how this happens:

- You've explained your work clearly in conversation
- They've seen a LinkedIn post that made your specialism obvious
- You've been introduced properly in a professional context

What to do at this level: Make it easy. Don't wait for them to ask. One clear sentence about what you do and for whom goes a long way – and so does a consistent LinkedIn presence that shows your expertise, not just your personality.

03 Professional relevance

They see your expertise as potentially useful to them.

This is where BD momentum really begins. It's not enough for someone to know what you do – they need to connect it to something in their own world. A problem they have. A change is coming up. Something they've been thinking about.

Examples of how this happens:

- They've asked your opinion on something in your area
- They reply when you share something relevant
- Their situation has changed – new role, a restructure, a project that didn't go well

What to do at this level: Share things that are useful and specific. Not generic content – insight that speaks to real problems your target clients actually face. And stay alert to external triggers on their side. A restructure, a new hire, a funding round. These moments often matter more than anything you proactively do.



Remember: earn the right to sell. A common mistake is jumping ahead before the relationship is ready.

04 Trust

They trust your judgment and see you as credible.

Trust isn't created through one moment – it's built through consistency. Being helpful when there's nothing in it for you. Following through. Sharing something they found useful. Showing up the same way every time.

Examples of how this happens:

- They come to you with questions
- You've been helpful with no expectation of anything in return
- You've been introduced by someone else as "the person to speak to"

What to do at this level: Keep showing up. Be generous with your expertise. Don't disappear between opportunities. Trust degrades over time if you don't maintain it – a contact who trusted you at level 4 can slide back after a long gap.

05 Comfort

They're comfortable having a commercial conversation.

This is the moment BD feels natural rather than pressured. The ask, when it comes, feels like the next logical step, not a pivot.

Examples of how this happens:

- They ask what you'd do in a situation they're dealing with
- They mention work problems without being prompted
- They've referred someone to you, or asked if you could help a colleague

What to do at this level: Don't wait. Use the gut-check test below. The relationship rarely feels as fragile to them as it does to you in that moment.



The gut-check test

Before you decide whether to have the conversation, ask yourself:

If I messaged this person today with:

'I'd love to explore whether there's a way I could properly help you, would you be open to a conversation?'

How would they most likely respond?

If your gut says they'd welcome it, you're probably already there. The only thing stopping you is you.

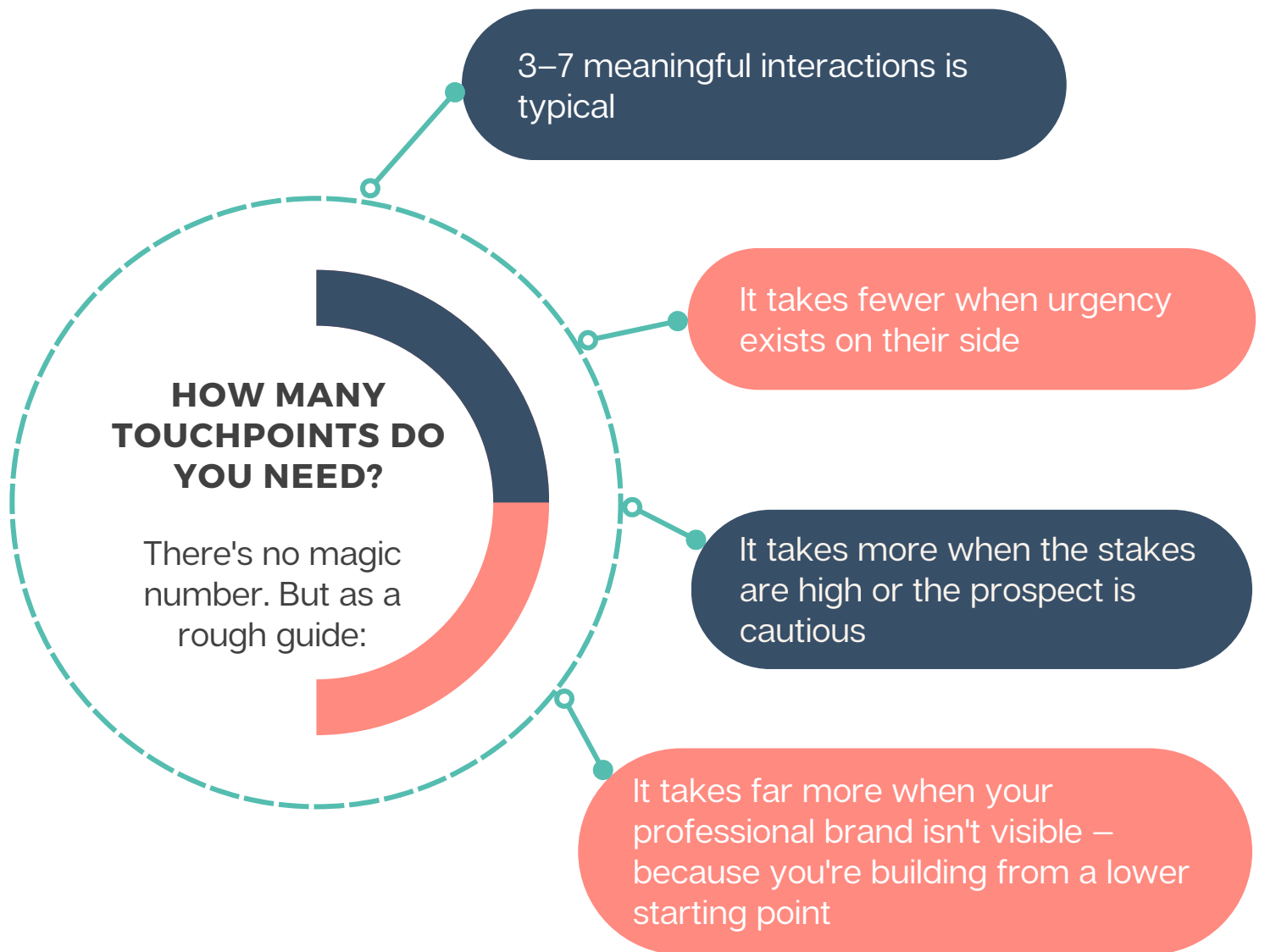
If you're not sure, that tells you something useful too. Either the relationship needs more work, or you just need a **lower-stakes way in**.

Examples might include:

- "I've dealt with something similar recently - I could share what we found if that would be useful?"
- "Do you want me to take a quick look at that?"

These approaches remove the pressure on both sides and let the conversation open naturally.

How many touchpoints do you need?



The number doesn't matter – the quality and timing do.

A few things worth knowing

01

The ladder isn't always climbed in order

Real relationships don't move neatly from 1 to 5. People stall. They skip rungs. And sometimes they slide back – a contact who trusted you at level 4 can go cold after a long gap, or after a change in their circumstances.

The question isn't just how do I move people up? – it's also do I know where this relationship actually is right now, and has anything changed?

02

Timing matters as much as the relationship itself

Someone can sit at level 4 for years and never convert – not because the relationship isn't strong enough, but because nothing has changed on their side to make it relevant. A restructure. A new role. A project that didn't go well.

These triggers often matter more than anything you do. Part of your job is staying visible for when the moment arrives – not forcing it before it does.

03

The real barrier to conversion is often you, not them

Even when someone is clearly at level 5 – comfortable, trusting, surfacing problems unprompted – a lot of people still hesitate. Not because the relationship isn't ready, but because they're worried about making it awkward or being seen as transactional.

If that resonates, name it – because the relationship rarely feels as fragile to the other person as it does to you in that moment.

A few things worth knowing

04

Sometimes the person you want to instruct you isn't the person you can currently reach.

In complex organisations, there are often multiple people at different rungs – a junior contact who likes you, a senior decision-maker you haven't yet broken through with, and a peer who could vouch for you if asked. Don't wait until you have the right relationship with the right person. Build where you can. The route to the decision-maker is often through someone who already trusts you.

05

It's easy to confuse activity with progress.

Conferences, newsletters, LinkedIn posts, mass email updates – these things have a place, but they are largely passive. They keep you visible without moving anyone up the ladder. If your BD diary is full but your pipeline isn't converting, ask yourself: how many of these activities were genuinely aimed at a specific person? Busyness can feel like BD. Often it's just noise.

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Trifecta is our monthly newsletter for lawyers and law firm BD teams. No generic advice - just practical insight on what actually moves the needle.

TRIFECTA 
BD newsletter

Sign up to receive BD insights, strategies, and tips.

BD that actually sticks

Most BD support gives lawyers a framework and hopes for the best. A training day runs, people leave with good intentions, and six weeks later, very little has changed.

The problem is rarely skill. It's usually knowing where to start, building confidence, and having a plan realistic enough to survive a busy week.

That's the gap GFC was built to close.

We work with mid-sized law firms and their lawyers – on associate training, 1:1 coaching, and in-house BD support. Whatever the brief, we start with what's actually getting in the way. Then we build habits that stick.

We're invested in whether the work actually changes something – not just whether the session went well.

We can help with:

- 1:1 coaching for partners and associates
- Associate and future partner training
- In-house BD team support
- Legal directory strategy and submissions
- Campaign design and delivery

If BD isn't working the way you want it to, let's talk about why.

We work with a small number of firms at a time – so it's worth a conversation sooner rather than later.



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