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MANAGEMENT

Honing Your Rainmaking Skills

How attorneys can develop and cultivate new client relationships

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Whether you are a solo practitioner, an associate or a partner, the ability to bring in business is fundamental to the success of your professional life. The more business you bring to your firm, the more economic value you provide and the more control you have over your professional life.

Rainmaking allows you to bring in the clients with whom you wish to work, do the work you enjoy, build your profile, enhance your reputation and increase your value to the firm.

Rainmaking, however, remains an elusive pursuit for many lawyers, even though most of them are already implementing some of the necessary skill sets, such as networking, speaking and writing. But such qualities by themselves are not enough. Successful rainmakers must possess four critical attributes that, when applied in a cohesive and consistent manner, will generate business. Those attributes are: having the right mind-set; taking leadership roles; caring for, protecting and guiding clients; and exhibiting time management skills.

Having the right mind-set when starting business development activities is key. Business development is like a

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retirement portfolio; you must contribute regularly to ensure a rewarding outcome. Investing haphazardly or in lump sums will not reap the same dividends as regular contributions. Similarly, rainmaking does not happen overnight, but only after the seeds have been planted, cultivated and nurtured.

Confidence in your abilities and the right attitude is essential, as rainmaking is a process that requires learning, tweaking and refining. During business development activities there will be numerous rejections, unreturned phone calls and situations where positive outcomes were anticipated. Ford Harding, author of *Rainmaking: The Professional's Guide to Attracting New Clients* (1994), says all too often attorneys tend to take rejection personally when they may not have the whole picture of what is occurring in the other person's life. Having a confident state of mind, knowing that the rejection is not personal and being able to continue in a steadfast manner, will go a long way toward maintaining a positive mind-set.

Attorneys also need to be cognizant of the unstructured nature of rainmaking. Unlike the legal work attorneys perform daily, where there is a clear structure of beginning, middle and end, the rhythm of rainmaking is very different. In many instances there will be no structure or system provided by the firm, but one that must be created by the practitioner himself. It is imperative to be consistent in business development activities, whether you focus for an hour at the beginning or end of the day. Getting involved in business develop-

ment only when business is slow will result in disappointment and frustration.

Ultimately, good rainmakers always see the glass half full rather than half empty.

Taking on leadership roles in professional, trade and civic organizations helps build your reputation and visibility and, more importantly, helps you get known, liked and trusted by target constituents. Leadership positions allow prospects to view firsthand how committed they are to these roles and responsibilities.

Yet many attorneys fall into the trap of following a textbook approach to increasing and building their profile by carrying out marketing activities they don't really enjoy. To ensure success in your business development endeavors, it is essential to choose enjoyable marketing tactics. Speaking, giving CLEs, writing bylined articles, putting seminars and conferences together and becoming a source for the media are all ways to increase visibility.

The key is to pick two to three of these activities and to apply them consistently. An attorney resistant to public visibility may want to start by writing for trade publications, becoming a source for the press or playing an active role on a committee of a trade organization that is responsible for planning and organizing educational programs and other activities.

The best rainmakers understand the 80/20 rule when deciding which clients to focus on and how best to maximize their time. The premise of this rule is that 20 percent of your clients generate 80 percent of the firm's business. Understanding the implications of this rule enables rainmakers to establish themselves as the trusted advisor to

their best clients; after all, these are clients with whom they have relationships based on demonstrated legal expertise. The more attention they pay to these clients, the more business they are likely to receive.

Good rainmakers take the initiative and time to get to know the problems and challenges facing their best clients. In turn, clients will rely on the attorney to see and anticipate any potential legal problems they may have, which may lead to additional business opportunities for the firm. Failure to provide such client-centric focus, however, will often result in clients taking their business elsewhere.

On a practical level, becoming more of a client-focused practice could be as simple as establishing a number of contact points beyond work-related issues. This could involve sending a news clipping of interest to the client, or forwarding an article that you or another attorney in the firm has written relating to the client's circumstances. Attorneys can also take note of client spouse/family details and/or any special interests they may have. Bottom line, the rainmaker's

objective is remaining on the client's radar beyond the legal responsibilities. The client needs to know and feel that they are genuinely cared for.

The final attribute that all successful rainmakers share is having good time-management skills. The best rainmakers know how to prioritize and focus on the most important tasks so they don't miss out on opportunities that might otherwise fall through the cracks; they remember, for instance, to follow up and to keep calendars of important dates for clients. They know when to delegate and outsource tasks to others. They also know which activities are time wasters, particularly the random acts of networking. On a very simple level this translates into taking an audit of how they spend their time before embarking on a focused rainmaking plan. The audit includes two lists: a to-do list and a not-do-to list; the latter will bring to the surface all the activities that are time wasters and reveal how much time they take.

Stephen Covey in his first book, *First Things First*, has a time management matrix, which he breaks into four classifications: The first quadrant con-

tains all the time-sensitive deadlines. The second quadrant focuses on important tasks but that are not time-sensitive. The third quadrant contains items that are not important or deadline-oriented, but we fool ourselves into believing they are important. For example, this quadrant often includes random acts of networking conducted by attorneys who don't have a strategic plan in place. The fourth quadrant includes activities that should be outsourced or delegated, as well as other tasks that are counterproductive, such as reviewing e-mails all the time. The key is to find a system that works for you and then focus on business development activities consistently.

Having good legal skills is a given; rainmaking is both an art and a skill. Most successful business developers are not born with rainmaking magic but have cultivated and learned the skills during their careers. In turn, when they see the successes they become more confident and continue building upon them. The more attorneys know how to attract clients, serve their needs and make money, the more control they will have over their professional lives. ■