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coaching services for legal professionals

## **Rainmaking 101: Tips for the Junior Attorney**

By Linda Tancs

A sobering fact is this: to achieve the highest level of success in private practice, you must be willing and able to build a book of business—and the sooner you start, the better.

Granted, there are some firms that might not even begin rainmaking discussions until an associate's third, fourth or fifth year in practice, but those finds are few and far between in a shrinking economy beset with client demands for fixed fee arrangements and lower expenses. In fact, the pressure on junior attorneys to begin adding to the bottom line will only increase as clients re-allocate their work in-house and practice areas suffer under the throes of economic indicators. So how can you add value to the firm and build the kind of practice that you desire? Here are some tips:

### **Check Your Rolodex**

What rolodex, you ask? The one you should be updating regularly with the names and contact information of your friends' employers, their friends' employers, your family's employers, business contacts, and those you've met at social and professional functions. It's easier to begin the process of assessing business opportunities with those

you know (directly or indirectly) or those you've met instead of starting your networking with total strangers.

### **Create a Plan of Action**

Once you've assembled a list of contacts and potential contacts, you've got some soul-searching to do. What kind of client are you looking for? Are you willing to accept referrals for business outside your practice area, even if firm policy precludes you from retaining billing control over matters outside your area(s) of practice?

### **Get Visible**

Be a thought leader. Instruct others. Give a presentation on the trends and issues in your practice area to local groups such as Rotary. Need help with your presentation skills? Consider joining a group like Toastmasters or getting coached. If public speaking is too threatening, then get published. In addition to legal-related periodicals, write articles for newspapers, newsletters or magazines in general circulation, or write for a trade publication that could benefit from your expertise. In this age of Web 2.0, don't forget about the power of marketing through blogs, social networks and podcasts.

### **The Power of Referrals**

An effective way to establish a client list is to provide the best service to clients you already represent. Encourage feedback from clients on your performance. When you get good feedback, be sure to ask your client to recommend you to others, and see if your client is willing to serve as a reference for prospective new clients you encounter. Also, find out which organizations your client belongs to and see if you can attend a meeting to network.

### **Find a Mentor**

Look around you. Who has the biggest book of business, and how did it happen? Whose practice do you most want to emulate? Identify those who have already succeeded and seek out their advice and assistance. Most people enjoy the prospect of being a mentor and will gladly offer their advice.

## **Be a Good Listener**

You can't market your abilities to a client if you haven't taken the time to hear what it is the client wants or needs. A good way to find this out is to determine what your client contact needs to perform his or her job most effectively. For example, suppose you practice trademark law and learned that your client's management is resistant to your contact's branding initiatives. What is it that your contact needs to effectively address management, and how can you help? Are there legal or business barriers that you can help your contact address? What kinds of information could you provide to your contact to better educate management? The key is to form a partnership with your clients. Once you understand their needs, issues and desires, you can sell the skills that you possess that are most likely to benefit them.

Practice these rainmaking skills so that when preparation meets opportunity, your prospective client will decide that you are the person from whom legal services should be purchased.