

3 Tips For Aspiring Rainmakers From The Pros

By **Aebra Coe**

Law360, New York (November 30, 2015, 4:45 PM ET) -- Veteran rainmakers sometimes hold the secret to success close to their chest, but six heavy-hitters have opened up to Law360, offering their advice on how to bring in business and build an impressive book of clients.

Young lawyers need to learn to cast a wide net — building connections with law school classmates, colleagues and mentors as well as with prospective clients — if their goal is to become a rainmaker, according to Joseph E. Tilson, co-chair of Cozen O'Connor's labor and employment department.

In today's world of frequent mergers and acquisitions, he says, attorneys cannot rest on their laurels or rely on a client or two to provide them with business for an entire career.

"You have to constantly be focused on bringing in new clients to replace those that disappear due to attrition resulting from corporate reorganizations and no fault of your own," Tilson said.

It takes discipline and a distinct skill set to become good at bringing in clients, said Donald S. Prophete, named partner of Constangy Brooks Smith & Prophete LLP.

"Lawyers aren't born business-originators; they are made business-originators," he said. "It's not an overnight game, nor is it for the faint-hearted. As I constantly tell my colleagues, if I can become a great business-generator, then really anyone can. Be bold; be brave; and be prepared."

Read on to learn their tips for becoming the next big rainmaker at your firm.

Be Willing to Burn the Midnight Oil

Amanda Martinsek, co-managing partner of Thacker Martinsek LPA, said young lawyers must consider the fact that being a successful rainmaker takes an immense time commitment, limiting what they can do in other aspects of their life.

"You need to be comfortable with that before you start planning to build a book," she said.

Tilson said aspiring rainmakers need to be able to get their billable work done for clients while at the same time attending receptions and conferences, socializing with prospective clients, and doing all of the other networking activities necessary to succeed.

"Inevitably, the lines between their professional life and their social life will become blurred as a result," he said. "It takes a lot of time and energy to establish those relationships that you need to become a rainmaker, which ultimately will result in personal sacrifices."

Prophete said bringing in business should become a lifestyle for lawyers looking to become business-generators.

"It's not an afterthought, or something they engage in when they have free time or when the bill collectors are at the door," he said. "Binge-marketing, like binge-working out, rarely achieves the expected results. Marketing must become part of the lawyer's lifestyle, and they must engage in activities conducive to such every single day," he explained.

Shook Hardy & Bacon LLP's Philadelphia managing partner Sean Wajert said those activities can include going to client lunches, blogging, updating social media sites, or a number of other pursuits aimed at building a solid reputation. But regardless of how a lawyer approaches building his or her client base, it takes a significant time commitment.

"Remember that if you want to transition from being an employee to a co-owner of the business, you have to show a willingness to act like an owner — the person who traditionally is the last to turn off the lights at night," Wajert said.

Build a Strong Network of Contacts

Kevin G. Lauri, office managing shareholder of Jackson Lewis PC's New York City office, says client development starts in law school and continues indefinitely. Lawyers should keep in mind throughout their career that today's junior attorneys will be tomorrow's decision makers, he said.

"I began my career at Simpson Thacher & Bartlett, and invested time in getting to know all of the associates at the firm," Lauri said. "These contemporaries eventually became a source of both work and referrals for me."

According to Wajert, it is important that young lawyers not get discouraged by the fact that many clients may not want to hire associates or that their peers may not yet be the decision makers giving out work.

"To a degree, some of the young attorneys' most important practice development activities are akin to laying seeds that will bear fruit down the road in their careers," Wajert said. "The regular contacts and communication now will put the attorney in a far better position to be considered down the road than a cold call after eight years incommunicado."

Wajert warned that those looking to succeed should be careful not to spread themselves too thin by joining too many civic, legal and practice-oriented organizations without having the time to be an active member in all of them.

"Paying the dues and having the name on your bio may not really help," he said. "Rather than the shotgun approach, think about focusing on a couple organizations, and make the time to attend meetings, serve on committees, meet other members over time who may serve as referral sources."

According to Steptoe & Johnson LLP partner Michael Dockterman, networking doesn't only happen among colleagues or clients; it involves building positive relationships in every facet of life.

“Build a name for yourself that is respected for all that you do,” Dockterman said. “Everyone with whom you deal is a future reference and reviewer, so treat them all with respect and courtesy. Even your enemies. Bring your judgment to bear because that is what clients value more than any ‘right’ answers.”

Don't Be Afraid to Ask for Business

One of the biggest impediments many young attorneys face is the fear of asking for work, including the concern that they are somehow “taking advantage” of a friendship if they ask a longtime acquaintance for work, according to Wajert.

But, he said, the opposite is true.

“If a college friend or law school classmate’s company has a legal problem, who better to handle it than someone personally known to be smart, hardworking and trustworthy?” Wajert said. “Always let the prospect know that you are happy to help if they ever need any legal work done.”

In his experience, Tilson said, many young lawyers tend to assume prospective clients know the attorney wants their business.

“Don’t be afraid to ask for the business,” he said. “There’s no substitute for flat out telling them that you would love to be their lawyer because they may not realize how important it is to you.”

Tilson suggested aspiring rainmakers shake off their fears and “cast a lot of bread on the water” so that they can maximize their at-bats.

“That means getting in front of as many decision makers as you can so that you have as many opportunities as possible to bring in business,” he said. “Your batting average is never going to be over .500, so you need to maximize the opportunities you have.”

Part of asking for business is demonstrating the ability to provide clients with the skills and expertise they need, according to Martinsek.

She advises those looking to climb the ladder to pay attention to the legal industry and to the industries that they want to serve so that they are able to demonstrate an understanding of the legal issues that confront clients or potential clients.

“Have a good idea of where you and your firm fit into your client’s legal concerns,” she said. “If you can’t add value from day one, you are unlikely to get a first chance to help a client, much less a second.”

--Editing by Jeremy Barker and Kelly Duncan.