



THE ATTORNEY'S RAINMAKING TOOLKIT

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As the gift-giving and receiving season comes to a close, is it not apparent that men like to acquire all sorts of specialized tools for various jobs? I rely on Gorilla Glue, duct tape, or Velcro to do the job. In my book if it can't be fixed with one of those, it probably isn't worth fixing.

Whether you are a man or woman, when your job entails climbing the ranks at the law firm and developing a client base — and possibly doing so while attempting to nurture and raise a family, and/or while providing care for aging parents or in-laws — having the right tools for the job is critical.

Whose Success Are You Dressing For?

Let's start with one outdated tool that should be purged from your toolkit. Some lawyers assume that they must mimic the way their predecessors — who are usually older and male — dress and act in order to be equally successful. In doing so, they become less genuine, and often less comfortable with the image in the mirror. Yes, your image is important. You need to exude confidence, success, knowledge, caring, and the ability to get things done. But be yourself. Be genuine. Unless your firm's culture requires it, you don't have to confine yourself to wearing black business suits with plain shirts or blouses, and foregoing a touch of personal flair.

The Rainmaker in You

Increasingly, I am finding members of the bar of both genders who totally avoid any attempts at rainmaking. Just the thought makes some of you squirm. I think that's because you've not analyzed yourself well enough to know where your comfort levels are, what specifically makes you uncomfortable and why, and more importantly, what your goals really are. For most of you who fall into this category, you have a history of having done one or two things early on, felt very uncomfortable or did not receive your anticipated result, and you gave up. You accepted your decision with a self-acknowledgement that this was an aspect of a legal career that did not suit you. And now, you probably think it's too late to rethink this position.

Let me assure you that anyone, at any time in their career, can begin to build a practice. And you don't have to do things which are totally outside of your comfort zone. Or, let me rephrase that by saying you can expand your comfort zone a lot easier than you realize. What you **do** have to do is acknowledge that your needs have changed. Make a plan. Apply the same competence, enthusiasm and energy as you do to your professional work. If you're not imaginative that's ok, because simple activities, well-executed, will reap rewards if you are persistent and consistent. And besides, you can always hire an expert to assist with the creativity part. Those are dollars well spent.

The starting point for anyone is to create a plan. If you are starting from zero, your plan is about activities designed to get you started. If you are an accomplished rainmaker, your plan is about refining focus and developing additional strategies to reach your target market, and retain good clients.

Regardless of your starting point, you need a plan each and every year. And you need to look at it throughout the year to assess your progress, and make appropriate course corrections. Your plan should be in writing. It can be as simple as a checklist on a legal pad, or a table in a document. (PBA members can contact me for a sample format for an easy written plan. Or you can ask your county bar executive to invite me in for a CLE presentation on strategic planning. That will get you forms, explanation, and credits as well.)

Your plan should be as objective (e.g. measurable) as possible. For example, instead of "increase networking activity" the plan should state "spend at least 15 hours this year in bar association activity which enables me to actively participate in a focused committee, section, or event." The first example is too amorphous. The second example is clearly defined, measurable, and easier to execute and track progress.

In a profession which is still greatly dependent on word of mouth referrals, developing a vast array of personal and professional networks is a vital first step. Remember, there are no bad networks. Just poor use of those networks. If your participation is all about meeting people who can give you legal work, that mercenary underlying motivation will come through clearly and thwart your efforts. Just because you show up at rotary club or chamber of commerce meetings regularly and exchange business cards, doesn't mean it will ever produce a dime of business. On the other hand, if you really get to know some of the people as individuals, if you volunteer some of your time to help the organization reach its goals, if you become known as a regular who is involved and interested, it will inevitably lead to business, whether than is direct or through referral. Remember



two axioms: 1) you only get out what you put in; and 2) half the battle is showing up!

If you are participating in networks because they are enjoyable — sports clubs, social networks, PTA, local government, environmental groups, hobbyists, charitable, religious, etc. — you need to get your antennae up, because there are prospective clients and referral sources in each and every one.

Being “out there” developing networks has additional meaning nowadays. With the advent of social media such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Blogs, YouTube and so forth, it now becomes infinitely easier to meet and interact with people you might never have been able to on a face-to-face basis. Did you know that all of the top Fortune 500 company executives are on LinkedIn? These tools are not a passing fad. They are a sea change in communications. A fundamental shift in the way today’s young CEOs and consumers find information, communicate, and make selections regarding goods and services. The fastest increasing demographic, you may be surprised, includes women between the ages of 35 – 55 years old!

Education-based marketing in the form of speaking and publishing are still highly successful marketing techniques in virtually all areas of law. Finding the opportunities were difficult in the past. Now one has the opportunity to self-publish and put free or paid seminars online, using free or low-cost social media tools.

Strategizing

Keep in mind that any plan must incorporate both long-term and short-term strategies. Short term strategies typically require as many as 6 quality “touches” to turn a stranger or acquaintance into a client or referral source. A touch can mean many things – meeting you in person, reading something you’ve written, hearing you do a presentation, having your name mentioned by a trusted source, reading a news article in which you are quoted as a source, seeing you “in action” in a non-legal setting, watching you represent an opposing party, and so forth.

Long-term strategies require 15 or more quality touches. Sometimes — oftentimes— lawyers have unrealistic expectations regarding how quickly they will achieve a return on their investment of time. Seminar presentations are excellent marketing strategies. Sometimes you get a call immediately. That’s what most of us expect. But that rarely happens unless the “touch” is just one of many which have preceded it. The reality is that it is really a long-term strategy. I get calls each year from prospective private clients who report having heard me do a seminar



presentation years before, and were so impressed they held onto the handout materials just in case they needed me at a later date.

Becoming a rainmaker is a possibility for every lawyer, no matter your gender or the stage of your career. It takes planning, competence, enthusiasm and energy. There are plenty of tools available to you.

A version of this article originally appeared in the January 2, 2012 issue of the Pennsylvania Bar News.

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