



BECOMING A SUCCESSFUL RAINMAKER

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I have been fortunate over the years to have worked closely with highly successful rainmakers. I have observed behaviors which I believe have helped them achieve success, and I have picked their brains without mercy for strategies and tips which would enable me to understand how they do what they do, and why.

Volumes can and have been written about how to successfully market your practice. Yet, I am frequently contacted by solo and small firm practitioners who are so overwhelmed after reading some of the marketing books, they are virtually paralyzed with indecision and cannot get started.

Becoming a successful rainmaker is a process, not an event. One must start out simply, by doing things which come naturally. And one must additionally develop some skills, one at a time, which do *not* come naturally, and which will take some thought and practice.

Consider first what comes naturally to you. Are you a good writer and do you enjoy writing? If the answer is yes, then seek opportunities to write. Find the industry publications which reach your target audience. Bacon's and Gale Directory of Publications list publications by industry, and provides editor address and telephone information, in addition to circulation and advertising rates. With this information, you can contact an editor and find out if there are any special issues coming up, to determine whether you can provide an article which would fit in well with a particular issue. Editors are always looking for willing authors.

If you make a commitment to write an article, be sure to follow the guidelines concerning length and format, and *never* blow the editorial deadline. Doing so will guarantee you a black mark among editors in that industry. Keep in mind that a reprint, even if only from the local "Hicksville News", is very impressive, and very effectively communicates your capability in the particular subject area to clients and potential clients.

Do you dread writing, but enjoy public speaking? If so, there are numerous opportunities. Your local bar association constantly searches for willing faculty for bench bar and other seminars. If you are active at the state or national bar level, additional opportunities can be had. But what if you don't benefit from referrals from fellow attorneys? Speaking engagements at bar association events are only of benefit if referrals are an important marketing strategy. If not, consider partnering with a CPA, financial

advisor, real estate developer, or whomever is relevant to your practice area, to develop and present a seminar to your targeted potential clientele.

One of the most important marketing skills is what I call the ability to “work the room”. This is the ability to turn any gathering of people, whether a social event, charitable event, or whatever, into a networking opportunity. I am amazed at how many attorneys consistently miss these opportunities. One particular attorney, whose practice was confined to personal injury, comes to mind. He was very active and well liked in his synagogue. Everyone knew him. Yet, he had never gotten a single case in over twenty years of active participation. How was this possible? Very simply, he never told anyone what *type* of attorney he was, or asked them to keep him in mind if they had an accident or injury.

Before you waste twenty years missing opportunities, let me provide you with some tips on how to successfully network, or “work a room”. These are skills and habits you must practice diligently so that you can become comfortable with them, and so that they become part of your “normal” modus operandi. Keep in mind that the purpose of networking is to pave the way for future work relationships. You are not trying to sell your services on the spot. You are only trying to establish rapport and make your area of practice known.

Before going to the event spend a little time planning. Think about who might be there, and who you might want to meet. Take an ample supply of untattered business cards, and have them available in an outside pocket so you can get to them with a minimum of fuss. Also have a pen handy so that you can make a note on the back for the convenience of the person to whom you hand the card. It is also a good practice not to take a card from someone else without immediately making a note on the back about the person, so that you can recall later why you took the person’s card.

If you arrive at the event early it will be easier to approach a stranger, since there will only be a few of you in the room. It’s an easy step to say “Hi, I’m John Smith. It’s nice to meet someone else who likes to arrive early.”

At most events, people tend to gravitate into conversational groupings. How do you get into the group so that you can introduce yourself? First, observe the group for a while. Focus on the various speakers, smiling and nodding in agreement. After you’ve gotten comfortable with the group’s dynamics, pick an appropriate time to join in with a comment which supports and/or adds to what someone has just said. You have just joined the group. It’s that easy. Don’t push your position in the group too quickly. You’ve joined, but are not the central focus of the group. You must participate equally with others for a while in order to work your way to the point of offering a group introduction, or taking the lead in the conversation.

As you participate in the group, try to determine who might be a potential client. To make contact with a particular person in the group, wait for a time when the person is not speaking or listening intently. Then make direct eye contact, and maybe lightly touch their arm or hand and say, “Excuse me, I just wanted to introduce myself” or “Excuse me, can I speak to you for a moment?”



When you let people know you're an attorney, be sure to let them know what type(s) of law you practice, in a simple, eloquent way which can be easily understood and remembered. For example, a corporate attorney might say "I assist businesses in managing their varied legal issues, whatever they might be."

Perhaps one of the most difficult challenges when working a room is how to tactfully disengage yourself from a group or from someone you've worked hard to engage in conversation. This is a skill which takes some developing, but it is worth the effort to avoid that lingering, painfully awkward conversation which leaves you desperately seeking an excuse to extricate yourself.

If you are a participant in the group, scale back your active involvement, and fade into the background. Then you can leave. It's just that easy. If you are engaged in a one-on-one conversation, you need to wait for a lull in the conversation, at which time you reach out your hand, shake the other person's hand and say "It's been really nice chatting with you. I hope we'll have the opportunity again." Then take your leave.

In order to become a successful rainmaker, you must build your skill set, as well as your comfort level with certain activities. Start with what you like and do best. And be sure you don't miss any opportunities to expand your network of contacts and potential clients. This will provide you with a successful foundation and sufficient confidence to expand your activities further.

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