

Keys to Success

Professional Development Tips for Young Lawyers



By David J. Oberly

The Personal Makeup of Top Rainmakers: A Roadmap For Young Attorneys

What is a rainmaker? A rainmaker is an attorney who, through his or her reputation, visibility, and community contacts, develops and generates a significant amount of legal business for himself and herself, and his or her law firm. Top rainmakers come in all shapes and sizes. With that said, three attributes in particular represent the hallmarks of those attorneys who outshine their peers in developing business for themselves and their firms.

Commitment

The first key attribute of top rainmakers is commitment. Top rainmakers make significant investments in establishing marketing as a mainstay in their overall practice of the law. They have a plan, and they actively work toward their goals on a daily basis. Importantly, they don't take days off from marketing, and they don't just engage in marketing activities when they feel like it. They are consistent and diligent in their marketing efforts and make marketing and business development part of their overall lifestyle. Top rainmakers are self-motivated and relentless in doing the little things that, over time, add up to landing new clients. And while quality counts more than quantity, top rainmakers devote much more time and effort to targeted marketing as compared to their peers. Top rainmakers make significant sacrifices in other areas of life because they understand and appreciate the significant requirements—in both time and effort—that are required to bring in business on a steady and consistent basis.

Engagement

The second top trait of rainmakers is engagement. Top rainmakers are oriented to activity. They feel uneasy when they are idle. When top rainmakers aren't arguing a motion or attending a mediation, they are actively engaged in a broad spectrum of marketing efforts. They take active roles in their organizations in which they are members, often obtaining leadership positions not simply to pad their resumes, but to make an active contribution to

the organization. They understand and appreciate the business of their clients but are also interested in their clients as people. They proactively, energetically, and tenaciously seek out opportunities to meet people and form deep relationships with others. They view relationships as the key ingredient to business development, and are engaged in not only establishing relationships, but cultivating and deepening connections on a consistent basis. Because of this, top rainmakers devote time and effort into building and refining their interpersonal skills and reputation.

In a given day, a top rainmaker may give a presentation on a hot-button legal issue to a local industry organization's monthly breakfast meeting at the beginning of a day, argue a summary judgment motion mid-morning, have lunch with a potential client, attend a mediation in the afternoon, work on an article at the end of the workday, attend a cocktail reception for members of the local bar association right after work, and judge a law school mock trial competition in the evening. Internally, top rainmakers excel at fostering cohesiveness and building loyalty in their teams. Top rainmakers possess a team-first mindset and are cognizant to shift credit for victories and successes to other members in their team, which increases the commitment of other team members to pursue and achieve the lofty levels of success that the top rainmaker is also after.

Achievement-Oriented

Finally, top rainmakers are achievement-oriented. Top rainmakers are driven by the relentless pursuit of excellence. They are frequently leaders not only in their home market, but nationally as well, where they are regarded as being among the truly elite in their given areas of practice. They are confident legal professionals who want the ball in their hands when the game is on the line. Top rainmakers set concrete, lofty, and oftentimes gaudy goals, and actively track them on a consistent basis. They consciously choose to utilize their time for marketing activities, as opposed to other more enjoyable, non-revenue-generating social endeavors.

They use their time judiciously, always maximizing each second they devote to marketing in a manner that produces tangible benefits for building new business and expanding current business with established clients. Top rainmakers are constantly looking two steps ahead of everyone else, to anticipate and ascertain the next big legal trend or development that will help drive additional business to their firms. In all areas of life, including marketing, top rainmakers take what is expected of them and double it, always doing significantly more than what is expected.

The Final Word

As an associate attorney, billable hours represent today's primary source

of income, but how you invest your non-billable time will determine how your long-term career plays out in the future. Importantly for young attorneys, successful rainmakers are made, not born. Rainmaking is a learned skill, not an inherent trait. In the real world of legal practice, successful business development—at its core—is founded upon a distinct set of skills and abilities. Although some individuals may obtain these skills faster or feel more comfortable exercising them, the truth of the matter is that these skills and abilities can be learned and developed by anyone. Accordingly, rainmaking success can be achieved by any attorney willing to devote the time and effort necessary to master the task.

As such, developing an intricate understanding of the key qualities and habits of top rainmakers, and then implementing these attributes and practices on a regular basis, should be a top priority for all associate attorneys. With the right amount of effort and practice, young attorneys can begin putting together the building blocks today to develop and refine the skills and talents that are needed to become a top rainmaker, which in turn will pave the way to originating a substantial number of new clients and business on a consistent, long-term basis.

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