

Make Yourself a Rainmaker

Start now on the path to generating business for your future law firm. Experts identify eight steps you can take during law school and your first days as an associate

BY ARI KAPLAN

Lawyers who work on matters generated by other lawyers typically have a job as long as their peers value their work. Lawyers who generate their own work have a job as long as they want.

That's one way of looking at the value of rainmaking—the ability to bring business to a firm. Lawyers who identify, attract, and retain paying clients are venerated at law firms, and their prospects for partnership are enhanced.

Although rainmakers may appear to be born that way, in fact they tend to follow steps that anyone, starting as early as law school, can learn and adopt for themselves. At least two law schools—Chicago-Kent College of Law and Valparaiso University School of Law in Indiana—offer summer seminars on client generation for students and alumni. These courses illustrate that rainmaking is a skill that can be learned.

Gabriel Galanda, a 2000 graduate of the University of Arizona College of Law, never took a course in client development. Even so, less than six years into his career, he can safely be called a rainmaker. The 30-year-old associate at Seattle's Williams, Kastner & Gibbs has brought 75 new matters to his firm since 2003, resulting in more than \$1 million in business. His clients include publicly traded companies, banks, apparel retailers, insurance firms, and 12 tribal governments in Washington and Montana. An authority on Indian law, he has published more than 30 articles, given more than 30 presentations, and is a leader in local, regional, and national bar associations.

Galanda believes that rainmaking cannot be learned from a textbook, because it is relationship-based rather than technical in nature, but he contends that it can be taught by example. He and others cite several core methods for navigating the path from making a living to making it rain: enhancing your legal skills, publishing articles, making presentations, participating in bar associations and community groups, building relationships, perfecting your pitch, finding a mentor, and creating a business plan.



Enhance your legal skills

Young lawyers with visions of becoming rainmakers do not work on soliciting clients right away. Instead, they focus on doing the projects assigned to them, seek more from their supervisors, and study their practice areas zealously.

“You cannot gain the respect of your colleagues if your legal skills are not up to par,” says Felice Wagner, CEO of Sugarcrest Development Group in Washington, D.C. The consulting firm puts on workshops for law firms on client development and partnership issues.

Although firms want their associates to become business generators, those associates must first demonstrate a commitment to their development as a lawyer, adds Ross Fishman, a consultant in Highland Park, Ill., who counsels lawyers on business development strategies.

“There is skepticism about people who seem more interested in marketing than practicing,” Fishman says.

As a law student or new lawyer, a good way to lay the groundwork for future rainmaking is to regularly read about developments in areas of law that interest you. Doing so can make you a more knowledgeable and effective lawyer, which itself can be a client generator. Reading up on legal trends also can help you identify new clients and areas of business.

Most law firm and law school libraries subscribe to legal periodicals. If you’re working at a firm, ask your librarian or firm administrator to be placed on the distribution list or to order your own subscription. If you’re in law school, ask the librarian to point you to them.

Purchasing subscriptions on your own may be affordable, especially if you’re a law student. For example, free or reduced-cost student membership in ABA practice groups provides subscriptions to magazines and newsletters such as *Business Law Today*, *International Law News*, *Criminal Justice*, *Probate & Property*, *Human Rights*, and *Litigation*.

The Internet is also a useful resource

Ari Kaplan is a lawyer and freelance writer in New York City. He can be reached via his web site, www.arikaplan.net.

for keeping up with trends in your practice area. If you’re interested in technology law, for example, consider subscribing to Gigalaw.com’s daily e-mail newsletter. Information about almost every practice area is available at Findlaw.com.

Aside from legal publications, many lawyers also read journals and magazines about the areas of business associated with their legal interests. If you’re working on customs law involving apparel, for instance, you might read *Women’s Wear Daily*. If you practice asbestos defense, you might read Mealey’s litigation reports on asbestos.

Reading up on legal trends is one way to enhance your legal knowledge and skills; observing and emulating professionals in action is another. If you’re working for a firm, you can ask to accompany more experienced associates and partners on important hearings and client meetings. Simply sitting in the gallery while watching a senior partner argue a motion can help shape your legal skills. These opportunities are often as easy to obtain as sending an e-mail and asking to attend.

Ironically, perhaps, another path to rainmaking is to take on assignments for which the firm isn’t getting paid. Pro bono work provides excellent opportunities to counsel clients, draft motions and pleadings, and argue in court. Aside from enhancing your legal skills, pro bono work may introduce you, directly or indirectly, to clients who can pay for legal services.

Publish articles

While Galanda has published numerous articles in his young career, new lawyers are advised to concentrate on writing just one for the time being—and not worry about publishing it in a top legal publication. “The publication in which it appears is almost meaningless,” Fishman says. “It will serve as a tangible example of your interest no matter where it appears.”

Publishing is valuable for several reasons, experts in legal business development say. For one thing, it forces the writer to understand a point of law well enough to convey that message to others. Once the message is shared with other lawyers and businesspeople, they may

take note of your name and associate you with a particular subject. This could result in client referrals or business queries from those who read your work.

Published work lets potential clients know that you are an expert in an area of law. Once published, you can use your article as a marketing tool that can be reproduced and sent to colleagues and prospective clients. In the digital age, there are also opportunities for online publication that can easily be distributed by e-mail.

While publishing an article may seem daunting, Galanda says “there is a misperception that it is difficult to get published, but it is flat wrong. There is a huge demand for quality scholarship, particularly items focused locally.”

Newspapers like the *National Law Journal*, bar association publications, and local legal newspapers all accept articles by lawyers. Many legal periodicals publish special sections on different practice areas throughout the year. These may serve as appropriate forums for you to publish on a specific area of law.

Don’t forget that most print publications have an online division. If you are unsuccessful in publishing in print, contact the online editors, who may need content on a more frequent basis.

Always consult a supervising partner and secure approval from your firm before seeking publication, both to ensure accuracy and to maintain consistency with the firm’s media policy. Consider offering to co-author an article with a partner with whom you work or would like to work. As Wagner puts it, “Opportunities come from relationships.”

Make presentations

Presentation opportunities often knock softly when you first start practicing, so listen closely. If a partner asks you to prepare PowerPoint slides for a client meeting or a continuing legal education course, make the best slides you possibly can. Similarly, if you are asked to speak about an issue you are researching, make it good.

Galanda says the number of people you address is unimportant. “I have spoken to groups ranging in size from 12 people at the Department of Defense to

700 franchise lawyers at a conference because I always assume that there is a potential client or a referral source in the audience," he says. "It is six degrees of separation kind of stuff."

At the beginning of your career, the most important element of business development is to become visible, Fishman says. That visibility will create dividends later when you are a more established practitioner.

Enterprising young lawyers will contact the partners at their firms who make presentations and ask to help them out on projects. Young lawyers can also contact local community associations or business groups and offer to speak at meetings about their area of expertise. A good source of information on these opportunities is the more experienced lawyers at your firm.

Get involved

Recent graduates should get involved in activities and associations because "it forces you to meet people and practice relationship-building tools," says Nancy Roberts Linder, a consultant who teaches the client-development seminar at Chicago-Kent College of Law.

Galanda took that advice a step further by founding Seattle's Northwest Indian Bar Association. What was a list of 21 names on a largely dormant e-mail list has become a thriving group of hundreds of lawyers with a common interest across the country.

"I studied Indian law and tapped into a tribal network nationally," Galanda says. "I created opportunities for myself to be viewed by the tribal public, members of which constituted prospective and now current clients."

You don't need to start your own bar association, but you should join something. If you're more interested in spending time with nonlawyers in a particular field, find a copy of the *Encyclopedia of Associations* at your local or firm library and identify a group with which you would like to become affiliated.

According to Wagner, how you conduct yourself in an association will be measured and watched closely. "People will use that as a proxy as to how you

will do as their lawyer," she says. "Folks who are most successful at using an association membership for getting business are involved and committed."

Build relationships

Many assume that meeting as many people as possible is a valuable form of marketing, but that is not enough. Linder recommends that lawyers help, learn from, and listen to prospective clients. "The practice of law is a relationship business," she says. "The only way to develop trust and rapport is by making relationships." Relationships start with an initial meeting but are nurtured by follow-up and commitment.

Young lawyers can develop this technique by creating a contact list of friends and colleagues. Let these people know when you publish, speak, and achieve professional milestones. If possible, learn their birthdates and send them a card or e-mail at the appropriate time. Periodically send them articles that may be of interest to them, whether or not they're written by you. Some associates set goals to have lunch with someone new once a month and then increase the frequency as they become more established.

"Holiday cards are automatic, but you should personalize all your efforts," says Galanda, who sent 700 holiday cards in 2005. Sending holiday cards reminds your circle of contacts every year that you are available to assist them and that you are grateful for their consideration.

"It's never too early to be planting the seed for the development of business," Galanda says. Contrary to many lawyers, he says "networking" is not an appropriate way to describe this process. It's more of a lifestyle, he says, similar to what is described in Dale Carnegie's famous professional guidebook, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.

New lawyers need to remember that "your clients in a firm are the other lawyers inside of a firm," Wagner says. "You want to be the go-to associate because down the road that will make you the go-to partner." To that end, write your personal biography for the firm's web site and update it often as the need arises. In addition, volunteer to assist with mar-

keting efforts by either contacting your firm's marketing director or reaching out to a knowledgeable partner. "Being liked and doing good work are the hallmarks of success," Galanda says.

Perfect your pitch

One of the best techniques that law students and young lawyers can master is the art of self-promotion. The key is creating a brief summary pitch about who you are and what you do.

"You want to be remembered and establish a connection so that when there is a need, you are the first person someone thinks of," Galanda says. "You never get a second chance to make a first impression."

Practice your pitch in front of the mirror or by setting up a video camera at home and recording your self-introduction. Galanda recommends that you focus on navigating events like cocktail parties. "Bring your business cards and figure out how you are going to introduce yourself in 20 seconds," he says.

Find a mentor

Wagner recommends that young lawyers seek out a partner or senior associate who can help them navigate the politics of the firm and build their network. Do not, however, approach someone with whom you have no relationship and ask them to take you under their wing. Instead, find a reason to interact with that individual either by co-authoring an article, assisting on a presentation, or accompanying him or her on a case matter. Then, tell the person you admire a particular skill or personality trait and ask whether you can periodically seek his or her guidance on career issues.

"When a mentor gives you advice, you need to follow the advice and then let the mentor know that you did so," Galanda says. Treat mentors as part of your network by remembering their birthdays, sending holiday cards, and updating them on your progress and marketing efforts.

Create a marketing plan

Law firms are increasingly asking associates to create personal marketing plans, which require them to set goals for their first few years of practice. This plan is

essentially a timeline with events listed on a monthly or yearly basis. For example, a first-year associate may include attending continuing legal education courses, reading journals, and creating a contact list for his or her first six months of practice. Other items may include writing prospective articles, taking on pro bono assignments, and participating in bar association events.

“There is a lot to be said about forcing yourself to sit down year in and year out setting goals,” Galanda says.

Such marketing plans are road maps for incorporating into your routine all the skills that make one a rainmaker. They also enable you to realistically gauge when you will have the time and discipline to achieve certain milestones.

“There is a misperception that there is a rainmaker blueprint, and one size fits all,” Galanda points out. “You can dispel that myth in your very first year of practice by individualizing the steps required for you to control your own destiny.”

Galanda cautions that laying the foundations for rainmaking “takes a ton of time, energy, and vision.” Last year, he spent 666 nonbillable hours on business development, equal to nearly 13 hours a week, every week of the year.

Such a commitment, Galanda adds, requires one more thing: passion. “If you don’t have a passion for the type of practice you are in,” he says, “it just doesn’t work.” ■