

What Rainmakers Know About Persistence

August 18, 2011, Posted by [Stephen Seckler](#), President, Seckler Legal Coaching



Building professional relationships is critical in selling legal services; and one of the key ingredients in building professional relationships is [persistence](#).

To illustrate this point, [one recent study](#) found that on average, corporate counsel need to be asked up to seven times before they will agree to meet with an attorney who wants their business. Interestingly, the same study showed that 90% of attorneys give up after one try.

In other words, if you want to build a practice, you need to be willing to face a lot of rejection.

In baseball, succeeding 3 out of 10 times means you are a superstar. In selling your legal services in a competitive marketplace, think of yourself as a batter in a league with amazing pitching. Good rainmakers understand this. They are building relationships all the time with clients, potential clients and referral sources. They know that generating work means taking chances and that only 20% of their activity will yield direct results. They also know that while it is helpful to be strategic about where to invest their time and energy, that it is impossible to know in advance which of the 80% of activity will be wasted.

In many ways, direct rejection is the easy case. “We’ve decided to hire firm X because they have more experience handling patent infringement cases” does not leave a lot of room for ambiguity. You are not going to get the work. Perhaps you can leave the door open for other types of litigation (e.g. perhaps the client will use your services when they don’t want to pay large firm rates); but it’s clear when you get feedback like this that it is time to move on.

Unanswered e-mail and phone calls are another story. In many ways, voice mail and e-mail present some of the biggest obstacles for anyone trying to build a law practice. Simply put, many people don’t respond to all of their messages. Your message, as the vendor who is pursuing a potential client, goes to the bottom of the queue.

It’s a frustrating challenge for most of us (i.e. those of us who are risk averse lawyers.) When someone doesn’t respond to a message that we have sent by e-mail or left on voice mail (or with

a secretary), it feels like a rejection. When two or three messages go unanswered, most of us will give up. By doing so, however, we are all leaving opportunity on the table. Because we don't want our ego's bruised any further, we stop trying.

But here is the bottom line: **RADIO SILENCE IS NOT REJECTION.** Until a prospect tells you that he or she is not interested, you have no idea why they are not responding; and if the individual is someone who you really want to do business with, then you need to keep trying.

There is always the risk of "Fatal Attraction" syndrome and it is definitely possible to overdo it in your pursuit. In all likelihood, that is not going to be your biggest challenge. As long as you spread out your requests (first by days, then by weeks and then by months), you'll be fine. Using a "multimedia" approach can also help (send an e-mail first, call and leave voice mail second, check with secretary third and possibly even send a letter—the point is to mix up your approach). Finding a new angle to approach the individual can also give you new reasons to reach out.

In some ways, it is narcissistic to think that a lack of response has anything to do with you. There are many reasons why someone may not be returning your call. The following is a list of some of the reasons I have encountered in the past year (all had nothing to do with me): one partner was going through a divorce, one consultant was trying to juggle a busy practice with remodeling his home, one partner was not ready to deal with marketing (my core area of consulting) and was focused instead on difficult staffing issues and running his own busy practice.

In each case, I eventually landed a meeting with these individuals and in each case, they apologized for being so unavailable. And in each case, their unresponsiveness clearly had nothing to do with me and I would have missed out if I had not persisted.

No one likes rejection. But building your own law practice requires the ability to face up to a lot of rejection and move on. Ultimately, you will develop the business you want and your professional satisfaction will grow. In short, **DON'T GIVE UP!** Your persistence will pay big dividends.