



TOP TEN MARKETING TIPS FOR FIRST AND SECOND YEAR ASSOCIATES

by
John Remsen, Jr.

There are two kinds of lawyers in private practice. There are lawyers with clients, and there are lawyers who work for lawyers with clients. My question to you is this: Which would you rather be in ten years?

I submit that lawyers with clients are working with clients they enjoy and on matters they like. They are in control of their careers, and chances are they are having a lot more fun and making a lot more money than lawyers without clients. They are emerging as leaders in their firms and are sought after by other firms.

No doubt, one can make a fine living as a journeyman lawyer grinding away at the billable hour....day after day, month after month, year after year. But let's face it, when it comes to being a lawyer in private practice, rainmaking is where it's at!

As a first or second year associate, now is the time to begin developing good marketing habits that will pay off over the long haul. These habits should play to your likes and interests, and be consistently applied and performed in a thoughtful, proactive and strategic manner. No one expects you to go out and "slay the dragon" as a young lawyer. The key at this stage of the game is to focus on habits.

Even the American Bar Association suggests in its "Model Diet for Associate Attorneys" that, in addition to 1,900 billable hours, you devote 400 nonbillable hours to things like service to your firm and profession, pro bono, professional and client development and the like.

So here we go, offering TheRemsenGroup's **Top Ten Marketing Tips for First and Second Year Associates**.

You'll notice that our list does not include: "Meet your billable hours requirement." That's a given. It's the investments of your nonbillable time, your thought capital and even in your wardrobe that will set you apart.

1. Excel at the Basics

Take every opportunity to learn and hone your lawyering skills. Arrive on time and stay until the job's done. Ask thoughtful questions. Pay close attention to detail. Meet your deadlines. Seek feedback about your performance. As a first or second year associate, your clients are the partners of the firm. Partners notice when associates are in the office late or when they're slipping out early on Friday afternoons. Make sure you earn their notice in a positive way by just becoming the best lawyer you can be.

2. Find a Really Good Mentor

Don't wait on your firm to establish a formal mentor program. Identify and spend time with that lawyer who embodies what you want to be and emulate his or her good behaviors. Since you're asking your mentor to be generous with his or her time and talents, reciprocate by delivering yours. Find opportunities to do good work for your mentor.

3. Stay on Top of Current Events

Absorb as much as you can in the law firm environment by staying abreast of the most recent laws and codes, but don't forget to pay attention to the rest of the world. Make it your daily practice to read the local newspaper or business journal. Subscribe to the *Wall Street Journal* or *BusinessWeek*. Find out what your partners and their clients are reading and follow their lead.

4. Declare Your Major

Clients hire specialists, not generalists. Study after study says so. They want experienced lawyers who have logged time with one particular kind of law. For you, that means that you should figure out where your passion lies and develop a niche practice around it. Be the go-to associate for partners who are involved in your area of interest. If you're still unsure of what type of law sets you on fire, research legal trends. The earlier you discover what you enjoy and start building your credentials around it, the sooner you will be earning premium fees for doing what you love.

5. Develop a Game Plan

Your time is valuable, so don't waste it on random acts of lunch and golf. Spend a half day or more to develop a thoughtful personal marketing plan for the year. Your plan should be realistic and achievable. It should be specific and focused. Do stuff you enjoy -- golf, hunt, eat, drink, have fun. We recommend 100 hours and a budget of about \$1,500. Best of all, most law firms will pay for your marketing activities. You'd be a fool not to take advantage. Go for it.

6. Dress Like a Lawyer

Like it or not, how you package yourself at work goes a long way toward establishing credibility. We recommend that young lawyers look like polished professionals. That means a coat and tie for men, always. Spend some money and buy good shoes. Be well-groomed and avoid flashy jewelry. Hide your tattoos. Looking presentable will make you feel more confident, and if you want to be a high-price lawyer, you need to look like one. Dress is especially important for women lawyers.

7. Hang Out at the Bar

Start building your credentials by spending time at your local or state bar association. If you've identified a niche or particular practice, join that section of the bar. Don't just pay the dues. Regularly attend meetings and work toward a leadership position. If you're practicing in a state that offers board certification, study and earn that certification.

8. Develop Your A-List

Create and cultivate a list of contacts, phone numbers and e-mail addresses for people with whom you want to develop business relationships. Early in your career, the list will include mostly college and law school classmates, friends and family members. Focus on developing meaningful relationships with your peers. They may not be decision makers now, but many of them will be ten or fifteen years from now.

9. Keep in Touch

Now that you have your A-list contacts, find ways to stay on their minds. Send birthday or holiday cards. As you come across relevant articles or best practices, share them with your contacts, always prefacing the article with a short personal note. For the tech savvy, connect with your contacts on social networking sites like LinkedIn, Facebook or Twitter. Invite contacts to lunch or have them join you at alumni meetings or social events. Most firms I know reimburse their associates for the cost of these activities.

10. Be a Hero

Find out what your firm is doing in terms of marketing and business development and get involved. If you're a strong writer, volunteer to research and write articles for your practice group newsletter. Your practice group doesn't have a newsletter? Maybe you should start one. Help plan and organize firm seminars or client appreciation events. One associate who volunteered to take over a languishing firm brochure earned enormous positive recognition (plus a big year-end bonus) when she brought the project to fruition.

As we mentioned at the beginning of this article, there are two kinds of lawyers in private practice. Lawyers with clients, and lawyers who work for lawyers with clients. Which would you rather be? If you want to be a lawyer with clients, developing lifelong, sustainable marketing and business development habits as a young associate will put you in a great position ten to fifteen years from now. The time to start developing those habits is now.

© 2009, TheRemsenGroup

###

About the Author

John Remsen, Jr. is President of TheRemsenGroup, an Atlanta-based marketing and management consulting firm that works exclusively with lawyers and law firms. His articles have appeared in numerous ABA, ALA and LMA journals and publications. For more information, visit www.TheRemsenGroup.com.

TheRemsenGroup

655 Sherwood Road NE - Atlanta, GA - 30324

404.885.9100 - FAX: 404.885.9111 - www.TheRemsenGroup.com