

FOR ATTORNEYS:

Making Relationships Count in the Coming Year: Five Simple Steps to a Successful Start

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How would you like to generate an additional \$500,000 in revenue next year?

A few years back, we reported on a revelatory program executed by Jill Weber, the CMO of Leonard, Street and Deinard. The program aimed to help 20 partners generate an additional \$500,000 in revenue each. And the program worked – it generated an additional \$7.5 million in revenue for the firm in its first year.

There is no question that the program's success was due to a number of factors (selecting the right partners, training and incentives, etc.). But the core of the program was getting the partners to simply make building the right relationships the predominant focus of their business development time.

Over the years, we have worked with some of the top business generators and leading firms across the professions executing the same kind of programs that Jill Weber executed. If there is one trait that separates the top producers from the average professional, it is their ability to build world class relationships with clients, colleagues, professional allies and potent referral sources.

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This is especially true in the legal profession. If you don't believe me, ask a rainmaker that you know. Ask them which people and relationships had a pivotal role in building their practice. My guess is that they will point to a set of highly valued relationships as the difference-makers in their career.

We have found that these top producing attorneys see themselves as entrepreneurs in the relationship business, rather than solely being an attorney or subject matter expert. So, instead of spending all of their time networking with strangers or mere acquaintances, the top producers recruit, build and manage a winning *team* of committed business partners who make them successful by:

- Acting as the attorney's personal marketing and sales force
- Providing a steady stream of "pre-sold" opportunities for new business
- Pro-actively calling and making introductions to potential new clients
- Creating word-of-mouth advertising that builds up the attorney's professional reputation
- Acting as a mastermind group

Starting Next Year on the Right Track

Your primary career goal next year should be to develop and cultivate the set of business relationships you need to succeed. Why will this work? Because if you take the same actions as rainmakers do; then you will start to produce similar results.

Here are 5 simple relationship steps that will start building your new year opportunities right away.

1) A Client Who Could Make Your Year

Your Goal:

The first job in business development is to market to your existing clients. Focus first on those who have abundant additional service potential and where you have strong personal chemistry.

Actions to Take in January:

- Review your list of top clients
- For each, think about any potential trauma, pain, problems or opportunities they face, considering financial, economic, business issues as well as strictly legal ones
- Rank order the list in terms for their degree of trauma and strength of your personal relationship with them
- Pick the top client, and list three questions you should ask them to see if they are in distress
- Call and schedule a breakfast or lunch meeting with them

2) *A Client Who Acts As Your Salesperson*

Your Goal:

Get clients to call and make introductions for you.

Actions to Take in January:

- Describe your ideal client in as specific and vivid detail as possible
- Review your client list, select a client who a) knows a lot of your ideal clients and b) where you have strong personal chemistry
- Think about what you could do for them and why they will help
- Call to make an appointment for breakfast or lunch
- Ask them to make 1-2 introductions for you this month

3) *An "Inside Ally" And Mentor*

Your Goal:

You should be working with the top producers at your own firm. Find ways to co-market with them. Ask them to coach you on what you should be doing to grow your practice and build your personal network. Get their advice and counsel on how you could play a valued role in helping to market them and the firm

Actions to Take in January:

- Think about the top producers or rising stars at your firm
- Rank order them in terms of the quality of your personal chemistry with them
- Consider the challenges they face and how you can help them
- Set up a meeting
- Brainstorm and select 2-3 ways you can market together. For example, network into a prospective opportunity, do a joint article, do a roundtable together or double-team an association. (For more ideas, see www.sagelawmarketing.com/networking_book.)
- Agree on the next steps to take immediately
- Agree on a monthly meeting for coaching sessions

4) A Professional "Outside" Ally and Business Partner

Your Goal:

Recruit an entrepreneurially-minded professional as your ally. Figure out a game plan for you to go to market together as a team - and be first on each other's list for referrals and introductions

Actions to Take in January:

- Think about the professionals you know in related professions such as accounting, banking, investment banks, risk management, etc. Consider professional who also work with some of your top clients.
- Prioritize this list based on a) their access to your type of ideal clients, b) their marketing and selling capability, and c) your degree of trust and personal chemistry with them
- Set up a lunch and ask your ally how they plan to build their business over the year. Look for synergies. Probe for ways that you can help them.
- Discuss 1-2 joint marketing efforts. For example, write joint case studies, start a "bring a client to lunch" series, or team up with the ally to conduct a breakfast roundtable. (For more ideas, see www.sagelawmarketing.com/networking_book.)
- Agree on the immediate next steps.

5) A Matchmaker

Your Goal:

Find somebody who already knows many of your ideal prospective clients. Ask for their help and see how you could help them.

Actions to Take in January:

- Think about somebody who is active in an organization, such as an association, that is replete with your ideal clients. It could be the head of the association as well as the program or membership chair.
- Meet and ask them what 2-3 biggest challenges they face in building their association over the next year
- Agree on a role that you could play in solving this problem
- Ask for their help in making introductions for you to your ideal prospective clients.

What's next for the rest of the year?

Keep the momentum and results coming with these five habits and actions:

1) Make relationship building a daily priority: Your relationship building plan is your daily "to-do" list. Devote a specific section of your to-do list to identifying 1-2 daily actions to build your relationship with your allies, colleagues, clients or new contacts with potential. These actions can be as simple as sending an article, making a call or setting up a lunch or coffee get together. Besides taking the action, this approach helps you to build the mindset of a rainmaker.

2) Eliminate excuses: You don't have to be a natural born rainmaker to build these relationships. You simply have to be organized, empathetic and a good listener. And you have to make the time to get it done. And it doesn't make a difference if you are a seasoned partner, newly promoted or an associate. This should be a top priority for all attorneys.

3) *Identify the players who must be on your team:* Your "A" team of top relationships must include clients, colleagues, allies in related professions, as well as movers and shakers in the business community.

4) *Determine a winning game plan with these players:* This boils down to defining a) how to build your personal chemistry with the individual, b) knowing their business priorities, aspirations and points of pain and c) identifying ways you can add value and help these people to become more successful.

5) *Set monthly action plans throughout the year:* Each month you simply review the contacts and results you made for the current month and identify your goals for the relationship in the upcoming month. In addition, you identify opportunities to meet and add high quality people to your network of business contacts.