



How Attorneys Can Develop and Cultivate New Client Relationships: Honing Your Rainmaking Skills

By Paramjit Mahli, SCG Legal PR Network

Whether you are a solo practitioner, an associate, or a partner, the ability to bring in business is fundamental to the success of your professional life. The more business you bring to your firm, the more economic value you provide and the more control you have over your professional life.

Rainmaking allows you to bring in the clients with whom you wish to work, do the work you enjoy, build your profile, enhance your reputation, and increase your value to the firm.

Rainmaking, however, remains an elusive pursuit for many lawyers, even though most of them are already implementing some of the necessary skill sets, such as networking, speaking, and writing. But such qualities by themselves are not enough. Successful rainmakers must possess four critical attributes that, when applied in a cohesive and consistent manner, will generate business. Those attributes are: having the right mindset; taking leadership roles; caring for, protecting, and guiding clients; and exhibiting time-management skills.

Having the right mindset when starting business development activities is key. Business development is like a retirement portfolio; you must contribute regularly to ensure a rewarding outcome. Investing haphazardly or in lump sums will not reap the same dividends as regular contributions. Similarly, rainmaking does not happen overnight but only after the seeds have been planted, cultivated, and nurtured.

Confidence in your abilities and the right attitude are essential, as rainmaking is a process that requires learning, tweaking, and refining. During business development activities there will be numerous rejections and unreturned phone calls in situations where positive outcomes were anticipated. Ford Harding, author of *Rainmaking: The Professional's Guide to Attracting New Clients* (1994), says that all too often attorneys take rejection personally when they may not have the whole picture of what is occurring in the other person's life. Having a confident state of mind, knowing that the rejection is not personal, and being able to continue in a steadfast manner will go a long way toward maintaining a positive mindset.

Attorneys also need to be cognizant of the unstructured nature of rainmaking. Unlike the legal work attorneys perform daily, where there is a clear structure of beginning, middle, and end, the rhythm of rainmaking is very different. In many instances there will be no structure or system provided by the firm but one that must be created by the practitioner himself or herself. It is

SCG Legal PR Network

Connecting legal experts as sources with journalists



imperative to be consistent in business development activities, whether you focus on them for an hour at the beginning or end of the day. Getting involved in business development only when business is slow will result in disappointment and frustration.

Ultimately, good rainmakers always see the glass as half full rather than half empty.

Taking on leadership roles in professional, trade, and civic organizations helps build your reputation and visibility and, more importantly, helps you get known, liked, and trusted by target constituents. Leadership positions allow prospects to view firsthand how committed they are to these roles and responsibilities.

Yet many attorneys fall into the trap of following a textbook approach to increasing and building their profiles by carrying out marketing activities they don't really enjoy. To ensure success in your business development endeavors, it is essential to choose enjoyable marketing tactics. Speaking, giving CLE presentations, writing bylined articles, putting seminars and conferences together, and becoming a source for the media are all ways to increase visibility.

The key is to pick two or three of these activities and apply them consistently. An attorney resistant to public visibility may want to start by writing for trade publications, becoming a source for the press, or playing an active role on a committee of a trade organization that is responsible for planning and organizing educational programs and other activities.

The best rainmakers understand the 80/20 rule when deciding which clients to focus on and how to maximize their time. The premise of this rule is that 20% of your clients generate 80% of your business. Understanding the implications of this rule enables rainmakers to establish themselves as trusted advisors to their best clients; after all, these are clients with whom they have relationships based on demonstrated legal expertise. The more attention they pay to these clients, the more business they are likely to receive.

Good rainmakers take the initiative and time to get to know the problems and challenges facing their best clients. In turn, clients will rely on these attorneys to see and anticipate any potential legal problems they may have, which may lead to additional business opportunities for the firm. Failure to provide such client-centric focus, however, will often result in clients taking their business elsewhere.

On a practical level, becoming more of a client-focused practice could be as simple as

SCG Legal PR Network

Connecting legal experts as sources with journalists



establishing a number of contact points beyond work-related issues. This could involve sending a news clipping of interest to the client or forwarding an article that you or another attorney in the firm has written relating to the client's circumstances. Attorneys can also take note of client spouse/family details and/or any special interests they may have. Bottom line: the rainmaker's objective is remaining on the client's radar beyond the legal responsibilities. The client needs to know and feel that he or she is genuinely cared for.

The final attribute that all successful rainmakers share is having good time-management skills. The best rainmakers know how to prioritize and focus on the most important tasks so they don't miss out on opportunities that might otherwise fall through the cracks; they remember, for instance, to follow up and to keep calendars of important dates for clients. They know when to delegate and outsource tasks to others. They also know which activities are time wasters, particularly the random acts of networking. On a very simple level, this translates into taking an audit of how they spend their time before embarking on a focused rainmaking plan. The audit includes two lists: a to-do list and a not-to-do list; the latter will bring to the surface all the activities that are time wasters and reveal how much time they take.

Stephen Covey, in his first book, *First Things First*, has a time-management matrix, which he breaks into four classifications. The first quadrant contains all the time-sensitive deadlines. The second quadrant focuses on important tasks that are not time sensitive. The third quadrant contains items that are not important or deadline oriented but that we fool ourselves into believing are important. For example, this quadrant often includes random acts of networking conducted by attorneys who don't have strategic plans in place. The fourth quadrant includes activities that should be outsourced or delegated, as well as other tasks that are counterproductive, such as reviewing emails all the time. The key is to find a system that works for you and then focus on business development activities consistently.

Having good legal skills is a given; rainmaking is both an art and a skill. Most successful business developers are not born with rainmaking magic but have cultivated and learned the skills during their careers. In turn, when they see the successes, they become more confident and continue building upon them. The more attorneys know about how to attract clients, serve their needs, and make money, the more control they will have over their professional lives.

About the Author

Paramjit L. Mahli is with award-winning SCG Legal PR Network. She is a former journalist who has worked with CNN Business News, Canadian Broadcast Corporation and Journal of Commerce. Comprised of small and Am Law 100 firms, SCG Legal PR Network connects legal

SCG Legal PR Network

Connecting legal experts as sources with journalists



experts with reporters nationally and internationally. Ms. Mahli is a contributor to Legal Broadcast Network and writes frequently for Technolawyer. She also trains and gives CLEs regularly on media relations. Ms. Mahli can be reached at pmahli@scglegalprnetwork.com.

About SCG Legal PR Network

SCG Legal PR Network is a global network that connects lawyers as expert sources with reporters and features a 24/7-accessible database of legal experts from a variety of areas. Its team is comprised of former award-winning journalists whose experience spans over three continents and 30-plus years of experience in the field of journalism and public relations. For more information about the SCG Legal PR Network, please call 212-661-9137 or visit SCG Legal PR Network's Web site at <http://www.scglegalprnetwork.com>.