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Case Study: How Three Rainmakers Bring In New Business

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I'm going to tell you here about a trio of rainmakers who were not born with business development skills. They're nice guys, but are not extraordinarily charismatic. They have no secret techniques they apply to get new business. In many ways, they are quite dissimilar.

They are just very successful. And what they exhibit in common, are some important traits of business getters:

- They make time for business development as an important part of their practices;
- They recognize and quickly act upon opportunities when they arise; and
- They are very goal-oriented about getting new clients.

In the case studies below, you'll see how they demonstrate these traits.

It's also clear that these partners treat business development as serious work. And they all work at it, very hard:

- **They actively work their networks.** None of them went to Ivy League law schools, but all of them have crafted rich networks of contacts, stay in touch with their contacts, and work to grow their networks.
- **They are meticulous about recording their rainmaking activities.** They can recount their new-business meetings in detail – the date of the meeting, the location, who attended and what was said. It takes them only seconds to pull the business card of the person they met or find the notes they took.
- **They don't work alone.** When they go on a new business call, they ordinarily take along another partner or associate. They find that it helps to have an ally when meeting a prospective client. If they originate a file, the rainmaker typically gives the work to his colleague.

These partners recognize they must put enough files on their own, as well as several colleagues', desks to keep the firm alive. To some degree they're surprised that the

other lawyers in the firm don't generate as much business as they do, because they don't feel they're doing anything special when they originate new files. It's just their results that are special.

Rainmaker No. 1: *"I just gotta do it."*

Number One is a big, tall fellow with energy to burn and generally upbeat. He's partial to wearing business-casual clothes and no tie. Number One is the sparkplug for marketing in the firm and runs the regular marketing meetings. He likes to get things done. A Phi Beta Kappa from a mid-tier law school, he's now in his mid-50s and been a litigator for 30 years. He is in business to make money and he knows that means getting new clients.



Number One gets out of the office a lot, visiting clients at their offices with other partners in tow, taking lots of contacts out to lunch, and accompanying clients and prospects to sports events (with tickets provided by the firm for business development purposes). He is well aware that business comes in via relationships, and those must be built face-to-face.

Key sales technique: He gets nearly half of his business from referrals from a bigger law firm. The bigger firm often finds itself conflicted out of litigation matters or handing off a type of case they just don't handle. Number One always makes sure he's available to pick up their work, gets the job done right and makes the bigger firm look good to the client. He would never try to "steal" the client, because his primary relationship is with the referring lawyers. He makes sure the big-firm lawyers know that Number One appreciates the referrals, and regularly includes them in non-business events and group outings. He made a point of getting close to the referring lawyers from the big, so he could get introductions to other lawyers there.

Number One always has plenty of prospects in his pipeline – banks, insurance companies, builders and investment advisors. And he is very persistent. He will make numerous visits and phone calls to his prospective clients until they finally relent, and let him help them.

"How do I find time?" he asked when I interviewed him. "I enjoy going to games. But I don't really enjoy the work involved in business development – it's just the way it is, I just gotta do it. It's part of being an owner."

Rainmaker No. 2: *"I'm constantly trying to figure out how to get on the radar of a prospective client."*

Number Two is a formal-looking gentleman with white hair. He looks the part of a lawyer: tailored gray suits, white shirts and red ties. He keeps the suit jacket on even when he's in the office. He went to a mid-tier law school law school but also has a

Master of Management from a top-ranked university. He has an unflappable manner as if he doesn't have anything to prove. And he doesn't! At age 60 he's practiced governmental relations for more than 25 years.



Throughout his career he's developed the knack of picking winners among those running for local or state office, and helping them win by holding fundraisers for them. When they get elected, they always remember their friend Number Two. He stays in touch with these elected officials to keep the relationships going – but doesn't bother them too much, because he doesn't want to appear to be a busybody – which he's certainly not. But Number Two always accepts invitations to holiday parties the councilman holds and always says “yes” when asked to help raise election funds.

Recently a Fortune 100 company came to the city with big plans to roll out new services. It would require that the company get all sorts of permits and comply with a laundry list of regulations. The mega-company asked a city councilman to suggest a good lawyer, and the councilman – who's known Number Two for years – recommended him. The new work added sizzle to the firm's client roster and should keep several lawyers busy for a year or more. Number Two knew what to do then: he immediately made plans to meet the politician for a drink, and a sincere thank-you.

Another time, a friend invited Number Two to attend a private luncheon with a high-ranking state official. The lawyer jumped at the chance to meet the newly-appointed official since they didn't know each other. No work came out of the meeting, but Number Two got what he needed: an introduction. It was one of many lunches that keeps his network strong, with general counsel, division heads, bank executives and hospital administrators.

Key sales technique: What makes rainmakers so successful is that they have more relationships than ordinary attorneys, and Number Two makes it part of his routine to see his contacts face-to-face. He also maintains the relationships for decades – some as long as 30 years.

He told me, “There is so much competition from other lawyers trying to get the same business. I'm constantly trying to figure out how to get on the radar of a prospective client.”

Then he smiled and said, “I talk to the general counsel who's using megafirms and ask, because we are in a recession, whether they'll be happy that they are paying \$200/hour more than our firm charges. I ask them “are you happy about their rates?” and see what they say.”

Rainmaker No. 3: Persistent and able to speak their language

Number Three has practiced employee benefits law for 20 years, after attending a state university law school. But his defining characteristic is his persistence. He recognizes new business opportunities immediately and always follows up. The lack of immediate results doesn't make a difference to him; he just keeps moving forward. For example, he recently made half a dozen marketing calls in last two days but unfortunately did not reach any of his targets. He made four follow-up calls after earlier meetings with potential clients, but couldn't work out a mutually-convenient date to schedule a second meeting. He will continue to make calls to others that offer a decent possibility of new work. He's going to a college alumni event, for instance, just to meet one target face-to-face. And he just joined a businessman's club in the city for more direct contacts.



Plus he's the kind of guy who will do a favor for a business friend without expecting anything in return. For example, when a businessman's son needed help getting a job interview, Number Three made a phone call to someone he knew and made sure the son got an interview. When the businessman wrote a personal thank-you note and sent over a food basket, Number Three couldn't understand what all the fuss was about. Doing favors is just what Number Three does.

This combination of persistence and willingness to help really pays off. He recently got a six-figure assignment from a company he had been pursuing for an entire year. The company had been using a much bigger firm, but Number Three stayed on the pursuit, well aware that his firm's high quality at lower rates would prove attractive.

Key sales advantage: Number Three is a lawyer who can talk to clients in their own business language, a quality they clearly appreciate. He worked as a legal consultant with several human resource consulting firms, and was Associate General Counsel for a retail company, an electric utility and a farm products company. He makes the best use of this experience and his talents, emphasizing one-on-one meetings, rather than public speaking.

How about You?

If you would like to be a rainmaker yourself, model yourself after this very special trio. Remember, they make time for business development as an important part of their practices, recognize and quickly act upon opportunities when they arise, and are very goal-oriented about getting new clients. And they work at it very hard. There's no black magic involved – just using a lot of shoe leather and treating business development like “real” work.

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