

Demonstrating Value at Work

By Courtenay R. Dunn

At the Women in Law Leadership (WILL) Academy, presented regularly by the ABA Commission on Women, participants learn to take charge of their leadership potential, develop business, and take their careers to the next level. The WILL Academy features programming on cutting-edge issues of importance to every woman lawyer and opportunities to network with leading lawyers, general counsel, and judges from around the country.

Learn about more Commission on Women events at www.abanet.org/women/.

At the sold-out American Bar Association Women in the Law Leadership Academy (WILL), presented by the ABA Commission on Women and the ABA Young Lawyers Division this April, the discussions produced several practical take-home messages about how young lawyers can bring value to their employers in today's job market:

Bring yourself to the table

As a young lawyer, you probably have yet to do much high-profile, high-visibility work. Some of your responsibilities may be nonbillable or administrative tasks. However, every assignment is an opportunity to prove what you can do. That seemingly low-profile internal research memo could land on your managing partner's or general counsel's desk. Give your all in everything you do and approach all of your work with enthusiasm. Over time, you will develop a reputation for producing quality work and having a great attitude. Colleagues will notice and want to work with you.

Quantify your value

Even for nonbillable responsibilities that garner little recognition, take credit by quantifying your work in a way that makes sense to your organization's bottom line. For instance, illustrate to your employer that your associate development and mentoring work saved "X" amount of money on employee retention or turnover. Understand your organization's business objectives so that you can add value, contribute meaningfully, and quantify your value in the most effective way.

Tell your client or boss the time, not how you made the watch

Deliver the bottom line in the most efficient manner. Your client or boss is interested in the resolution of the project he or she gave you; they are much less interested in knowing the time it took, how late you stayed, and other anecdotes about the project. Especially in this economy, being the most effective attorney possible is essential as a practitioner and of great value to clients and firms. To demonstrate this value, you must both perform and deliver.

You cannot put "bills hours" on your résumé

Billing hours may be how you account for your work, but it is not your *only* responsibility. Also focus on the specific services you perform for your clients, special skills or niche areas you have or want to develop, and your commitment to the best client service. Being mindful of more than billing hours and recognizing your professional development and achievements will help you convey them to those who determine your value to your organization.

Bringing value to everything you do and quantifying your contributions in terms of your organization's bottom line will set you apart and help others to appreciate your hard work. Ultimately, the WILL Academy take-home messages for the young lawyer go back to the basics: work hard, be prepared, deliver on commitments, and take the initiative to develop yourself professionally.

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