ABA Business Law Section
Spring Meeting
March 29, 2019

Brand Management: Using Your Brand to Maximize Professional Relationships
Young Lawyers’ Track
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Materials Summary Abstract

Last year, we talked a lot about how to zealously advocate for yourself and build your brand. Now we are going to discuss how to capitalize on the brand you are building and use it to maximize your professional relationships.

Branding is all about shaping others’ perceptions of you. Perceptions are not always accurate, but perceptions are all that matter. Intentionally branding oneself to fully capitalize on one’s unique strengths is a practice that requires focus and attention. Focus on both the inward-facing (inside organization) and outward facing (outside your organization) dimensions to one’s professional brand is key to having a strong, positive brand.

Brand management is the analysis and planning that goes into how your brand is received; it is an active process. Developing key relationships is essential to brand management. Elements of this process including presentation, skill, work product and work content.

Key relationships include those that are up, down and across. Stated otherwise, these relationships are with superiors, peers and subordinates. In maximizing these relationships, it is imperative that you get over any personal hang-ups you may have. For example, a senior partner’s or executive’s time is just as important as yours. Conversely, your time is no more important than anyone else’s. Authenticity is also key. Meeting face-to-face is an often overlooked but very important aspect – it is difficult to build relationships via e-mail or text
message. Being skilled at leading conversations is a necessary skill in maximizing these relationships: be specific in your thoughts, really listen and suggest ideas. Finally, be patient. It takes time to build quality relationships.

Some primary relationships to focus on are those with sponsors and mentors. Obtaining a sponsor, an individual with authority within your organization who will advocate for you and will intentionally use their influence to help you advance, can be an important part of one’s brand. Choice of sponsor will reflect upon the young lawyer and the brands of the young lawyer and her or his sponsor will become linked from the organization’s perspective. Mindfully choosing to pursue a sponsor relationship can be an effective tool in managing one’s brand. In maximizing your sponsor relationship, it is important to be proactive, be intentional and be assertive in making an ask of your sponsor where appropriate. You should be sure to have regular check-ins with your sponsor, whether on a formal or informal basis. In being intentional, you want to show your sponsor you have put thought into your interactions and can illustrate how their efforts to assist you will also boost your sponsor’s brand. Finally, a sponsor enters into that relationship knowing that part of the purpose is to assist in advancing you in your firm or organization. If there is a project you want to be on or a promotion you want to be considered for, ask your sponsor for help in making that happen.

Mentors are often outside of one’s organization and generally are individuals with relevant experience who are willing to provide support and assistance. Similar to maximizing your relationship with your sponsor, in your relationship with your mentor, it is important to be proactive, be intentional and be assertive in making an ask where appropriate. Reaching out to your mentor on a regular basis to schedule meetings in person or by phone is key to maintaining and maximizing this relationship. It is important to show that you value your mentor’s time;
having an agenda prepared for your meetings will demonstrate that you want to use your mentor’s time efficiently. If you need assistance in making a connection or would like your mentor’s support in something you are pursuing, do not be afraid to make a thoughtful request of your mentor.

Once you have created your brand, maintenance is critical. It is an active process that requires thoughtfulness and intentionality. Once major component is creating professional relationships and then maximizing them. These relationships can be the foundation that will help springboard you forward in your career.
Brand Management: Using Your Brand to Maximize Professional Relationships

Kate Harmon, Demetra Liggins, & Bemetra Simmons
What is a Brand?

• Everyone has a brand, whether you are managing it or not
• What people say about you when you’re not in the room
  – Not necessarily accurate, but perception matters
• Brand with intention
• Two kinds of brands
  – Personal
  – Professional
  • Different dimensions to your professional brand
    – Inward facing (inside your organization)
    – Outward facing (outside your organization)
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Finding Identity in Your Brand

• Decide your brand
• Communicate your brand
• Identify your brand team
• Execute your brand
Inward Professional Brand

• Colleagues’ opinions matter
  – Partners
  – Associates
  – Support Staff
• Formal Evaluations and reviews
• Word of mouth
• Sponsor
Outward Professional Brand

- Opposing Counsel
- Judges
- Board
- Bar Associations
- Civic Organizations
- Mentors
Personal Brand

• High school, college, and law school friends
• Neighbors
• Children’s friends’ parents
• Faith group members
• Social media
• Community involvement
• Non-profit involvement
What is Brand Management?

• The analysis and planning on how your brand is perceived

• Developing **key relationships** is essential for brand management

• Elements of brand management include presentation, skill, work product, and work content
Maximizing Key Relationships

• Get over personal hang-ups
  – Senior Executives/Business owners’ time is not more important than yours
• Be Authentic
  – Give a compliment
  – Be generous and gracious
• Meet Face to Face
  – Tough to build relationships via email or worse: text messages
• Lead masterful conversations
  – Be specific, listen, provide ideas
• Be Patient
  – Relationships take time; focus on your long term goals
Maximizing Key Relationships

• Resonate personally, emotionally
  – People do business with people that they like
  – They cannot like someone that they do not know
  – Find common ground and shared interest (sports, kids, hobbies, etc)

• Resonate on the business side
  – Focus on business conversations (i.e. growth, innovation competitive advantages)
  – Businesses focus on more than just saving money or lowering costs
Maximizing Key Relationships

• Provide Unique Value
  – Always bring something to the table
  – Essentially always answer the question why someone wants to do business with you

• Make them feel important
  – Everyone is important and likes to feel special
  – Contact people when you are not asking for something
  – Thank them for their business/referrals
Maximizing Key Relationships

- Share what type of projects/cases are keeping you busy
  - This provides knowledge of what type of business/referrals to send to you
- Express Your interest
  - Don’t be afraid to ask for the business
  - Learn about their goals and how you may be able to help them
Maximizing a Mentor

• What is a mentor?
  – Mentors do not have to be, and often are, outside of your organization
  – Someone with experience who is willing to support and assist you
  – Someone you can bounce ideas/issues off of
  – Someone who raises your confidence level and provides empathy
  – Very little, if anything, is expected in return
  – Paying mentorship forward helps to build your brand
Maximizing a Mentor

• **Be proactive**
  – Reach out to your mentor on a regular basis and schedule meetings (in person or by phone)

• **Be intentional**
  – Show that you value your mentor’s time – have an agenda prepared even if just in your head

• **Don’t be afraid to make an ask**
  – Mentors want to be of assistance – that is why they are investing in you
  – If you need help making a connection or need support for something you want to do - ASK
Maximizing a Sponsor

• What is a sponsor?
  – An individual with authority **within your organization** who will advocate for you and intentionally use their influence to help you advance
  – Sponsor’s efforts should result in high performance and loyalty from the sponsee
  – Your brand and your sponsor’s brand become linked
Maximizing a Sponsor

• Be proactive
  – Be sure to have regular check-ins – whether formal or informal

• Be intentional
  – Show that you want to help boost your sponsor’s brand in addition to your own

• Don’t be afraid to make the ask
  – A sponsor takes you on knowing that part of the purpose is to help you advance in your firm or organization
  – If there is a project you want to be on or a promotion you want to be considered for, seek out your sponsor and make your case.
  – Be prepared to show how your ask will have a positive reciprocal impact on your sponsor
Stay in Touch, Homies!

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