

Seeding the Clouds: The Delicate Art of Rainmaking in a Drought

Like many associates right now, Perkins Coie associate Kanika Chander (KChander@perkinscoie.com) wants to know what she and other newcomers to the practice of law can do to “make rain” in these dry economic times. She asked experienced rainmaker and Perkins Coie’s chair of business practice Stewart Landefeld (SLandefeld@perkinscoie.com) for his advice, as he has managed and developed significant client relationships (from the Mariners to Washington Mutual and from cell phone companies to Coinstar) over the past twenty-five years. Mr. Landefeld offers young lawyers the following tips:

Is it really practical for young lawyers who are new to the practice of law to try and build relationships and develop new business, especially during the midst of a lingering recession?

Stewart: Absolutely. In fact, for rainmaking purposes, there are many advantages to being at the start of your career! Like investments, developing relationships yields the best results for bringing in future clients over a long horizon. Your peers today will be the business leaders of tomorrow and possible future clients. You also will find that the professional relationships that you build at the beginning of your career, whether they develop into new clients or long-standing friendships, will keep your career fresh and fulfilling.

As for the economy, it is possible to think of a recession as a “gift” that only comes along once every six to eight years (thank goodness!). There are always many ways in which you can take advantage of having a little extra time on your hands that will leave you positioned to excel in your career once the economic tides turn.

Do you have any concrete examples of what I can do today to start rainmaking?

Stewart: Different rainmaking techniques appeal to different people. The most important thing is to choose the technique that makes you comfortable. If you are a “people person,” consider attending local fundraisers or bar-sponsored networking events and act as a liaison for the next generation of attorneys at your firm or office. If that seems outside of your comfort zone, focus on staying in touch with your current colleagues and former classmates. Keep tabs on what they’re doing, stay in contact as they move, and think of ways to collaborate across firms, practices, and industries.

If you enjoy writing, then another great way to forge business relationships is to author (or co-author) articles. This is an especially good use of time during slow times at the office. You should keep an eye out for relevant changes in the law or interesting current events and offer to write something for one of the legal publications in your area. When you are published, even in an internal client update, send out copies of your work to as many people as you know and especially to clients whose businesses may be affected by the topic. Current and prospective clients will remember your consideration and will think of you as an “expert” on the subject if they need help in the future.

As I spend most of my day reading and writing about law, what are some ways to develop business that involve going outside of the office and away from my computer?

Stewart: While my favorite lunch is a bagel alone in my office, it’s a waste of business development time *not* to have breakfast or lunch with peers, existing clients, or potential clients. If you can’t schedule a meal with pleasant people, at least schedule it in a pleasant place. Each of us should be out in the community for at least five meals, coffees, or meetings each week.

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Being involved with local organizations is another excellent way to meet community leaders, give back, and pursue outside interests. Plus, you'd be surprised how many groups would love to have a lawyer of any experience level on their board. But no matter whether you'd prefer to be behind your desk or out in the community, long-term loyalty and personal devotion to your existing clients are critical. Stay knowledgeable about your clients' businesses and keep in touch with them even when you aren't doing work for them. It can be as easy as scrolling through your contacts to find someone who would appreciate a quick phone call.

Any final words of advice about rainmaking for young lawyers?

Stewart: I can't stress enough the importance of doing what's comfortable for you. Beyond that, make sure that you "Just do it!"—Try out as many rainmaking techniques as possible until you're certain that you've found your sweet spot. And good luck!