

## **In Order to Make Rain, You Have to Know How to Gather the Clouds: Tips for Young Lawyers on Client Development**

*By Myra L. McKenzie*

Young lawyers who want long, successful careers in private law firms must work to exceed supervisor expectations, satisfy billable hour requirements, and please clients in the hopes of one day becoming partners and rainmakers. However, these efforts alone do not automatically equal rainmaking. As we know, in nature, rain does not appear spontaneously; rather, the atmosphere must be right, elements must be aligned, and clouds must be present for rain to fall. Likewise, in business, client development requires multiple steps and a focused effort. The ten tips below can assist lawyers who are trying to figure out how to gather the clouds needed to make rain.

**Do good work and always add value.** As a young lawyer, your first priority must be to learn the practice of law and become a very good lawyer. To be a very good lawyer, you must deliver timely and quality work product, put forth extra effort, and be indispensable to your firm. Showing how you add value to work will help you develop a good reputation within your firm and legal community and build goodwill amongst clients and potential clients. A good reputation is critical to the art of rainmaking.

**Find out if you have a client development budget and use it.** Determine if your firm has an associate client development budget. If such a budget exists, apply for and strategically use such funds. Importantly, you should keep a clear record of how you use the funds. This can assist you in receiving more funds in following years as you increase your client development efforts.

**Be strategic.** Create a strategic client development plan. Present your plan to mentors and partners, and refine the plan based on their feedback. Create timelines and implement your plan.

**Perfect your professional presentation.** Most law firms have Web sites that are viewed by potential clients. Have you looked at your Web biography lately? Does it reflect all your accomplishments? Does it tell potential clients what you have done and could potentially do for them? Does it reflect your activities in your community? It should make you look competent, well-rounded, and capable. If it does not, revise it.

**Research your potential clients and their needs.** Create a list of people you know or would like to know who own businesses, are decision makers in companies or organizations, and/or have excellent social and professional contacts where you live. Invite those with the greatest potential to give or refer business to lunch or a social outing (using funds from your client development budget). Talk about what you do. Ask about what they do and who they know. Start developing rapport with them, but understand that such rapport, like rain, isn't created instantaneously. Ease into discussions about their legal needs, and suggest how you might be able to assist them.

**Carry business cards and use them.** Giving and receiving business cards is an excellent way to expand your network of potential clients. Create a database and use it to send out: electronic alerts regarding new legal developments, case filing notifications, holiday cards, and invitations to firm-sponsored events. People always appreciate "freebies" and special attention. They will remember your efforts, kindness, and communications when they are faced with selecting counsel.

## American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division *The Young Lawyer*

**Speak and speak often.** Take advantage of opportunities to speak at local, state, and national legal conferences or bar meetings. The main audience for these events is other lawyers who can be excellent referral sources. If you have spoken on certain issues and have a reputation for being competent, you may be the lawyer who receives that next referral instead of a costly partner. Your experiences as a knowledgeable and effective public speaker will help build your brand as a trustworthy, intelligent lawyer.

**Get active in the bar.** Consider joining local or national bar associations. Become a committee member and take a leadership role in those associations. Certain roles within bar associations come with high visibility and can assist in establishing you as a leader within your legal community. Plus, some clients will be impressed with your leadership roles within bar associations as they suggest a high level of peer acceptance.

**Attend events frequented by in-house lawyers.** If you can choose CLE events to attend, consider ones where in-house lawyers speak and/or attend. Simply being present in those environments can yield dividends. In addition to hearing great sessions, you may receive some “face time” with one or more in-house lawyers and expand your network of potential clients. Keep in touch with those whom you meet. In-house lawyers who are responsible for national case or issue management sometimes use outside counsel. With communication, competence, good billing rates, and a great pitch, you may become preferred outside counsel for them.

**Learn to “pitch.”** After all your “leg” work is complete and decision makers are considering giving you legal work, you have to close the deal. You need to know how to “pitch.” Learn how by asking to be taken along to pitches that your supervisors or mentors are giving. Ask their advice when crafting your own pitch. Practice your pitch. You want your pitch to be good so as not to reflect poorly on your firm and lose potential business, but you will never be a rainmaker if you can’t pitch. So be confident in your ability and go for it!

### **NEXT STEPS**

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