

# Rainmaking

## Cultivating Your Existing Network: Tips for New Associates

**SUSAN SALTONSTALL DUNCAN** | Throughout the entirety of a lawyer's career, relationships continue to be the cornerstone of professional success. Even those fresh out of law school have a range of relationships that can bring value to their career and business development efforts. Understand the significance of who you already know.

Nurturing good relationships is the key to early and sustained success for associates. The first step is to be aware of all the people you already have in your network. Most of us have at least a few hundred people in our networks. Think about the various individuals who currently play a role in your day-to-day life. Think, too, of others you know with whom you're not in ongoing contact.

The people in your firm, clients, peers outside the firm, other professionals and friends can all be instrumental in building your skills, developing your reputation and helping you gain access to others who can provide needed information, useful connections and, eventually, new

business. Becoming more aware of the value that each does or could bring to you will help you pursue new opportunities to get the maximum benefit from these relationships.

### More-Senior Lawyers in Your Firm

There are undoubtedly partners in your firm from whom you will receive assignments and gain experience in counseling clients, trying cases and developing your lawyering skills. You will probably collaborate on projects with more senior-associates and other lawyers as well. Do not take these people for granted.

Begin by being respectful and responsive to their requests, seeking to help them deliver timely and exceptional service and work product to clients. Show an interest in their practice and business development goals. Observe their approaches and strategies and consider which could be effective for you. Stay curious and ask questions as you go.

In addition, strive to develop a personal rapport with them, finding

areas of mutual interest in hobbies, outside activities, family and backgrounds. Offer to help them with business development efforts or firm management projects in which they are involved.

### Secretaries and Other Staff

Remember that the non-lawyers in your firm are very valuable to you. In particular, more-senior staff who have been at the firm for a while will know a lot about the culture and personalities in the firm. Seek out their advice on who to go to for what and how to manage your time and multiple commitments.

Whatever you do, do not act superior or condescending to anyone on staff. You will risk offending those who could be your best sources of assistance and your most loyal allies.

### Clients

Clients are the lifeblood of your firm and of your professional success. Accordingly, your top priority is to show that you are valuable to them. Initially, this may be as the third or fourth person on the team. Even then, though, you have an opportunity to exceed expectations in service and work product, to ask good questions about their issues, and to look for ways to forge relationships with them that go beyond the matter at hand.

Overall, clients look first for lawyers who deliver value and results to them. But they are also far more likely to be loyal over time if they develop chemistry and trust with you. And once clients become your fans, they will often spread good words to



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others in your firm—and to their colleagues who could become new clients for you.

### Mentors Inside and Outside of Your Firm

In building your various skills, you will need to learn from those who have more experience than you do. At different points throughout your career, you will find that different people will be helpful in providing guidance and feedback. Because your needs for a mentor and the role the mentor plays will naturally change over time, you should seek new mentors at given intervals. These individuals can be professionals (lawyers or otherwise) inside your firm or in other firms. Even a former professor or allied professional can become an effective mentor.

The important thing is to determine what it is at a given time that you most need a mentor for. Some of the possibilities include guidance in the following:

- Legal skills development
- Client relations
- Internal politics and advancement
- Marketing and business development advice
- Work-life balance choices

Regardless of where you need guidance, don't wait to be assigned a mentor or for one to find you. Proactively pursuing a mentoring situation will help ensure that you find the type of person you need and with whom you have some chemistry and mutual respect.

### Peers and Classmates

Your friends and contacts from high school, college, law school, summer clerkships and judicial clerkships can all be valuable resources. Even if their value to you is not immediate, you

should stay in touch with (or at least keep track of) these contacts. All these individuals over time could provide you with information about trends, competitors, referrals in conflict situations, and introductions to prospective clients and other general information. They might even become people your firm can talk to if it is involved in lateral hiring.

Too often we wait many years before reconnecting with people from our past. But the nice thing about those in this part of your network is that there is a greater chance you share a mutual loyalty and memories that always provide a good reason or excuse to get back in touch.

### Allied Professionals

There are many professionals who do not practice law who could be very helpful to you. Consider the people you went to college or high school with, had as a professor, came into contact with while working with a client, or met while at a local business or community event. Think about your current and former bankers, real estate brokers, health care professionals, teachers, accountants and others. You probably know investors, entrepreneurs or individuals with a distinct knowledge in an industry or technical issue.

Build this base of contacts in a way that you can also provide them with value and information. When you do that, they will be more inclined to think of ways they can help you in return.

### Family and Friends

Last but not least, be certain that those in your immediate personal circle know what you are doing and that you know what they are doing. Sharing nonconfidential information about the types of cases you are working on, the

expertise you are developing, and the introductions you may be seeking for business development could easily trigger leads. Although you may not want to represent your friends and family as clients, you do want them referring clients your way and helping to build your reputation.

### Connecting Today

Whether you are naturally the type of person who finds it easy to make strong connections with others, relationship building is a skill you must master at least at some level. Both inside your firm and outside, others will consider how well and extensively you are able to reach out and connect with those in your network. Your professional success depends on who you know and how effectively you make, nurture and capitalize on these relationships. Fortunately, even in your early years, you already know a lot of people to whom you can reach out. <sup>1P</sup>

### Resources

- *The Lawyer's Field Guide to Effective Business Development* by William J. Flannery, Jr. ABA, 2007.
- *The Lawyer's Guide to Marketing Your Practice*, 2nd Edition, edited by James A. Durham and Deborah McMurray. ABA, 2004.
- *Rainmaking Made Simple: What Every Professional Must Know* by Mark M. Maraia. Professional Services Publishing, 2003.
- *The Rainmaking Machine: Marketing, Planning, Strategies and Management for Law Firms* by Phyllis Weiss Haserot. Shepards/McGraw-Hill, 1990 (with 1996 supplement).
- *Through the Client's Eyes: New Approaches to Get Clients to Hire You Again and Again*, 2nd Edition, by Henry W. Ewalt. ABA, 2002.
- *Women Rainmakers' Best Marketing Tips*, 2nd Edition, by Theda C. Snyder. ABA, 2003.