

Finding Time for Business Development

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I have visited dozens of law firms regarding business development. A question I ask at every session is, “What obstacles do you face in business development?” Guess what the No. 1 answer is always and everywhere. It’s “I can’t find the time to do it.”



Larry Bodine

It called to mind what the managing partner of a prosperous Silicon Valley law firm, told me about finding time for business development. “It’s the same question as asking ‘Do you want chemotherapy or not?’ However it beats the alternative: a painful death.

If you are dying of cancer, no matter how busy you are or how many client demands you face, you will find time in your schedule to get your chemotherapy sessions. You’ve made a choice: this is important to do and no matter what the obstacles are, I *will* find time to do it.

So when lawyers tell me they don’t have time for business development, what they’re really saying is, “I’ve set my priorities and business development is not on the list.” Every lawyer faces billable hour targets, firm administrative duties, hand-holding with clients, family and personal demands.

However, the successful lawyers have made business development a priority, and they find time for it. They are called rainmakers.

Here are some powerful facts about rainmakers.

- **Rainmakers have wonderful lives.** Rainmakers have a lot of relationships, which distinguishes them from “service partners” who have no clients.
- **Rainmakers don’t take assignments; they give them.** Rainmakers have an *owner* mentality. They know they must be very good at what they do and also be able to bring in enough work to keep themselves and several others busy. They control their own destiny because they have sought out clients who are people they enjoy working with.
- **Rainmakers are invited to positions of authority and often compose the entire membership of the management or executive committee.**
- **Rainmakers also have more job satisfaction because their clients give them**

projects they enjoy doing.

- **Rainmakers are *never* targeted for layoffs.**

The best way to find time to be a rainmaker is to weave business development into activities you are already doing. For example, you may stop at Starbucks on your way to work. Why not call a referral source and say, “I know you like double-tall skinny vanilla lattes. Let’s meet at Starbucks tomorrow morning and I’ll buy you one. We can also talk about our referral relationship.”

Another example: chances are that you eat lunch every day. However, you are most likely wasting it by working through lunch at your desk or going to lunch with your law firm colleagues. Instead, I recommend you spend a lunch hour visiting a client at *the client’s* workplace.

Don’t have the client come to your office and eat box lunches in a conference room. Go to the client’s facilities. It may be a factory, a lab or just a cubicle farm—but it’s *the client’s* cubicle farm, and she’s darn proud of it. Therefore you should resolve to spend every Wednesday or at least one day each week spending your lunch hour with a client.

Rainmakers have developed their relationships by being active in the community. They find an organization that they emotionally support and go to all the meetings. Chances are they are on the board of directors or the program director. They show up at *all* the meetings including the boring induction of officers and holiday party.

They know that they must be visible in the organization. If an organization has 500 members, you can either shake 500 hands or get on the board of directors—either way, everyone in the organization will know you.

The trick is that they found an organization whose meetings they *want* to go to. It’s not an effort to attend, and the rainmakers will *want* to attend regardless. You can find time to go to a trade association or business organization by finding one that matters to you. By getting to know the board of directors, the business will come naturally.

Many women lawyers face childcare and family duties. It’s especially difficult for them to find time for business development. I recommend you be like Lisa Landy, a shareholder with Akerman Senterfitt in Miami.

When her children were young, she would drop them off at a private preschool and noticed that the other parents were also professionals and executives. She decided to get active in the school’s board and began originating files from the parents of other children. The same idea will work for lawyers who get active in the PTA or organizations their children belong to.

I recall the day when my son was seven and was the pitcher for his Little League team. He was talking to the catcher, and I thought I’d get to know the catcher’s Dad.

Eventually I asked the Dad what he did for a living, and he said he was a Vice President at Amoco. I asked him about challenges his business faced, and he said they had invested hundreds of thousands of dollar in R&D to produce a truly clean-burning gasoline but that Amoco's competitors where unjustly claiming that their gas was just as clean.

I suggested he meet me at the Fairmont Hotel in Chicago the next Wednesday, and I'd introduce him to one of my firm's trademark, trade secret and copyright partners. In short, the VP became a client, and I had originated a Fortune 500 company at a Little League game.

My point is that there is indeed time for business development, but it's got to be a priority. You must bear in mind that you are a lawyer 24 hours a day. You don't stop being a lawyer when you leave the office. Every time you meet someone new or walk into a room, it's a business development opportunity.

When you're sitting across the table from opposing counsel, it's a business opportunity. When you're chatting with friends, neighbors and acquaintances, tell them you are a lawyer. You'll be amazed—you will suddenly find you do indeed have time for business development.

For more on this topic, call:
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