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## Making Time for Making Rain

### How Younger Lawyers Can Set the Stage for Obtaining Clients

by K.C. Victor

Law firm lawyers without a book of business do not control their own lives. Sometimes that works out just fine. More often, it at least creates an anxious professional life.

Even when one works with kind and benevolent bosses and partners, a non-rainmaker's mortgage will never take priority over a rainmaker's mortgage. More importantly, if the rainmaker leaves the firm, he or she seldom views it as essential to take the non-rainmaker along. It may be preferred or even important, but it is not essential.

Having clients is the surest way lawyers can maximize being able to work until they no longer need to work. That is not always possible as a young lawyer, but with a small or potential client base, it is possible to control substantial portions of one's own legal career. Although rainmaking is arduous at times, it is neither mysterious nor extremely difficult. It starts with making time to make it drizzle.

How do young, busy law firm associates snatch opportunities for actual or anticipated client development? The answer varies depending upon the style and size of the firm. A threshold question is whether the young lawyer's work environment encourages or discourages associates bringing in business. Does the firm teach rainmaking to all lawyers or does it forbid the pursuit of clients by young associates while withholding offers of partnership unless client acquisition skills are well honed? If associate rainmaking is not allowed, young lawyers can plant seeds. If it is allowed, young lawyers can learn how to woo and win clients. Here is how to hone skills for either situation.

1. Start with your college. Most of your college alumni did not become lawyers. Many of them are potential clients. Regardless of whether you knew someone in college, your fellow alumni and you have something important in common, something that in certain cases feels almost tribal. This feeling of automatic community is usually strongest for people who attended small or distant schools or where there was sport team spirit.

Unless it's impossible, attend every alumni gathering in or near your home community. Major reunions—for young lawyers, usually ten years—are worth a trip. The people who go to alumni activities care about their college. You will have a leg up with those people. At these activities, work the room. Meet people. Learn about who your fellows are. Ask what they do. Have conversations and collect cards.

Although it is generally not a good idea to pitch business at these gatherings, it is good to tell the people whose cards you are taking that you will call in the next few weeks. Once back on your home turf, think about the type of contact you want to make with the people whose cards you now have. Do you want to inquire about a business relationship or do you want to learn more about what your new acquaintance and his or her company does before deciding whether a professional relationship is fitting? Do you simply want to go to a show or take a hike because you learned you two have common interests? If you do want to talk business, develop a broad brushstroke plan about how to introduce yourself and your legal skills.

Particularly as a young lawyer, you want to create a relationship. Contact within a month or so keeps channels open. One conversation at an alumni gathering is unlikely to create a relationship, but a follow up call or sit-down coffee is often sufficient to get the ball rolling. For a start, make reference to the conversation you had at the alumni event. (In most jurisdictions, lawyers are forbidden to cold call for business. Simply having gone to the same college may be insufficient to overcome that restriction, but a meeting at an alumni event opens the door.)

2. These suggestions may work better with sorority or fraternity functions or even at high school or other reunions. Gatherings of many sorts present opportunities to meet potential clients. Were you in the glee club or on the school newspaper? Get as many alumni directories as you can and then get onto alumni events invite lists.
3. Unless you are a recluse, you already spend time with friends and sometimes make new friends. When I was a junior law firm associate, a helpful partner suggested I try to become friends with talented junior people at the firm's clients, e.g., analysts at financial institutions, junior account executives at agencies, etc. It was good advice. At the time, it made working for that client more pleasant. In hindsight, I made some lifelong friends, a few of whom are also now my clients.

Analogous to the experience of young associates at large law firms, few junior people at significant commercial or financial institutions become high-level executives with their first employer. However, if you meet a young professional and form a friendship, then, whether that person remains with his or her early institution or moves elsewhere, you may have made a friend who can also be a client.

4. Look around at all of the areas filled with people. It takes no extra time to begin conversations with people on trains and planes, in medical waiting rooms, post offices and other places. It is not rude to engage in conversation with strangers at theaters, restaurants and bars if you have something to contribute. Provided you ask permission to enter a stranger's conversation, a snippet of overheard talk is sufficient excuse to join in. Years ago my husband and I sat next to a man and his wife at a play that involved legal issues. We began talking about the play. One thing led to another, and the man became a client. If I had minded my own business, none of that would have happened.

5. Read local business papers. Are there businesses for which you and your colleagues would like to do legal work? Is it an area of business you wish to know more about? Call and congratulate the leaders of such organizations on any of their press-worthy successes. People appreciate being noticed. You may be welcomed to visit to learn more about the business. If you show a sincere level of interest and are a capable lawyer, you may find yourself with a new client. Understand your jurisdiction's ethics rules about solicitation of business and contact with non-clients to ensure your compliance.
6. Get on the e-mail lists for industries or business categories for which you would like to do legal work. Try to attend conferences or other meetings of professionals in those lines of work. Sometimes presentations are open to all, and free or quite inexpensive. Listen carefully and read the written materials. Ask questions to learn which legal skills those organizations need.

At business conferences, arrive a half hour early and stay a half hour late. Try to meet the presenters, who are often among the best networkers in their industry. Once again, the goal is to meet people and learn about their professional lives. This is repetitive, but so is breathing: collect cards and have longer conversations later. Business conferences are better than law conferences for two important reasons: your competition is seldom in the room, and the people may have actual and not just conflict or undesirable, work to give you.

Young lawyers suffer enough learning the nuts and bolts of the profession and responding to clients' and colleagues' demands. Creating a new variety of professional pain has little appeal and is seldom pursued. Seeding rain clouds doesn't need to be painful. Early rainmaking forays can fit into younger lawyers' lives with a moderate amount of thought and a little extra effort.

Awareness is key. The majority of potential clients with whom any young lawyer speaks will not become actual clients in the foreseeable future. Many may never send business. But some will. Some may send work years later, perhaps when they have joined a different organization. Others may refer friends, acquaintances or rivals. Nothing happens if you are not out there.

When you fit rainmaking into the rest of your professional life, it is unlikely to overwhelm you. If you get comfortable with the fact that client relationships build slowly, what looks like failure to the inexperienced and uninitiated may start to look like success to you. Potential is not inertia. If you can begin thinking that meeting new people and learning new things are worthwhile for their own sake, going forward with drizzle and rainmaking should feel more comfortable. It will never feel effortless, but when your relationships create business, it will feel worth the effort.

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