

Seven Habits of Successful Rainmakers

By Sara Holtz, ClientFocus

WHAT DISTINGUISHES LAWYERS who are very successful at business development from equally talented lawyers who are not as successful at business development? Seven habits.

A gregarious personality, a network of high net-worth individuals, or a competitive nature can all be assets in developing business. But not everyone has these assets.

However, cultivating these seven habits is well within the grasp of any successful lawyer with sufficient commitment.

Successful rainmakers treat their clients as the most valuable asset of their practice.

For most lawyers, the vast majority of new business derives, either directly or indirectly, from existing or past clients and referral sources. Past and current clients can be a source of new business by sending new matters. They also can be powerful referral sources.

Yet sometimes lawyers focus their marketing efforts on cultivating new relationships with people they have never done business with before. They ask these “strangers” out to lunch, invite them to firm seminars, and call and e-mail them. Meanwhile, their most valuable assets—their existing clients—are being neglected.

Successful rainmakers treat their current and former clients as well as, or better than they would treat a prospective client. They recognize that existing clients are the most important people in their marketing mix.

Successful rainmakers nurture their relationships with their clients by providing outstanding, not just good, service, staying in touch on a regular basis, seeking feedback, celebrating clients’ successes, and showing appreciation by sending gifts or hosting special client-appreciation events.

Successful rainmakers make business development a priority.

Successful rainmakers recognize that to be successful at business development, they need to make it a priority and work at it on a consistent basis. They treat their business development activities with the same level of commitment that they bring to client service.

Making business development a priority is as much about mindset as it is about time management.

There are opportunities to market each day. Throughout the day, lawyers talk to clients, opposing counsel, and consultants. Spending a few extra minutes deepening a relationship at the end of each of these conversations, whether on a professional or personal level, will dramatically increase the probability of being hired.

But mindset is not enough. Consistent business development requires a system. The approaches are limitless and highly personal. Some people spend the first ten minutes of each day involved in a business development activity. Some schedule business development on their calendars, just like client meetings or court appearances.

The important thing is that there is a structure in place that keeps marketing a consistent priority, as opposed to something that is done when there is a lull in a busy workload.

Successful rainmakers have a plan.

The people who are most successful at business development do not commit “random acts of lunch.” For example, less successful rainmakers, upon hearing that the best friend of their college roommate just became chief of litigation at a company, rush to have lunch with that person and “try to drum up some business.” Successful rainmakers recognize that such “random acts of lunch” are not usually successful and therefore not a good use of limited marketing time. Successful rainmakers ask, “Where am I going to focus my marketing efforts this year?” and then translate their answers into a written plan.

Plans can take on many different forms. They may be strategic and detailed, based on a vision, goals, targets, strategies, and activities. Or a plan may be something as simple as consistently pursuing three marketing activities that have been successful in the past. One of the simplest plans consists of writing an annual goal (for example, get three referrals from the corporate department) on an index card and placing it in a pencil drawer. Every time the drawer is opened, the goal is there. Either consciously or subconsciously, that goal becomes a filtering device to determine what activities to engage in that day.

Successful rainmakers focus on high-potential marketing opportunities.

Lawyers are very busy people. Under the best of circumstances, they have a limited amount of time to invest in marketing.

Successful rainmakers focus their limited marketing time where they can get the biggest return on their investment: high-potential targets that are most likely to become clients or refer them to potential clients. Typically, these targets are existing or former clients or those who have referred in the past. These are people with whom the rainmaker has a relationship based on demonstrated trust and knowledge of capabilities.

Successful rainmakers do not market to people who don't know them or their work until after they've mined their existing relationships.

Successful rainmakers invest their time in high-payoff marketing activities. These activities vary from person to person, depending on their practice, their personal strengths, and where they are in their careers. But the important thing is to focus on those activities that actually produce business or, at least, leads. Few marketing activities produce results immediately, but, if after a reasonable amount of time an activity is not generating new work, it is not a high-payoff activity.

For the vast majority of lawyers, the high-payoff activities are those that involve building personal relationships with clients and referral sources—taking people out to lunch, staying in touch on a regular basis, and asking clients about their kids or another personal or professional subject that is important to them.

Successful rainmakers follow up consistently.

The biggest marketing mistake that lawyers make is failing to follow up. Many embark on a marketing campaign by taking prospects out to lunch or giving a speech to a local industry group. Then, because of the demands of a busy practice, they fail to follow up. Eventually enough time passes that they then feel very uncomfortable about following up.

Statistics show that less than 3 percent of all sales—and, after all, pitching legal services is a form of sales—are made on the first attempt. It's unlikely that the prospect who's taken to lunch will make a hiring decision on the spot.

Hiring a lawyer is not like buying another pair of shoes. There are very few legal services that are discretionary. People only hire a lawyer when they actually have a need for their services—when they've been sued or when they want to make a deal. Successful rainmakers recognize that their marketing activities must coincide with the client's need. And the only way to ensure that happens is to use consistent follow-up to stay on the client's screen.

Many lawyers worry about being too intrusive in their marketing, and obviously nobody wants to do that. Successful rainmakers look at their marketing contacts from the client's perspective rather than their own. They consider what the client wants to learn, not what they want to tell the client. With this mind-set, the client's reaction is likely to be, "Thanks for sending this information. This is really useful," not, "Quit bugging me!"

Successful rainmakers listen more than talk.

Listening can be a big challenge for lawyers who are used to being the ones with the answers. People come to them with problems, and they want advice on how to solve them. This leads lawyers to think people are looking for a persuasive argument as to why they should hire them. But nothing could be further from the truth!

Successful rainmakers recognize that before they can sell something, they need to know what the prospective client wants to buy. Even the most articulate marketing pitch will fail if the client does not need the services being marketed.

Successful rainmakers take time to understand what their clients' needs are—not what they hope or think the clients' needs are—but what their actual needs are. The only way to discover what clients require is to ask and then listen to their answers. Only after clarifying their clients' needs do successful rainmakers try to sell their services.

Successful rainmakers ask for business at the appropriate time.

Once they are clear about a prospect's needs and are confident they can help, successful rainmakers ask for business. This is perhaps the most difficult of all habits to cultivate. Lawyers fear rejection and take it personally. But successful rainmakers realize that people can only hire them when they have a need. The probability is that there is nothing personal about not "making the sale."

Successful rainmakers have figured out a way to comfortably ask for business. Some people bring a marketing lunch to a close by asking, "When do we get started?" Others might find that approach difficult. They may choose to ask, "So, what's our next step?" or "You know, I'd really love to have an opportunity to work with you, because I think I can address your needs. I think you'd be a great client and I'd really enjoy working with you. How do we go about doing that?" No matter what approach is used, like the Nike ad says, eventually the time comes to "Just do it!"

With the other six habits firmly in place, asking for business may not be so daunting. Once a client's needs are understood and a relationship is established, asking for business becomes an extension of the roles of counselor and problem-solver—familiar and comfortable roles for lawyers.

Successful rainmakers are made, not born.

Most successful business developers are not born that way. Consciously or unconsciously, they have adopted certain critical habits. Employing these habits consistently has given them confidence in their marketing abilities. It also has positioned them in their clients' minds as a trusted advisor and a natural choice to handle pressing legal issues.

By incorporating these seven habits into your marketing approach, you too can become a successful business developer.

About Sara Holtz

ClientFocus founder Sara Holtz helps successful lawyers become successful rainmakers. Since 1995, Sara has worked with hundreds of partners from the nation's leading law firms to help them grow their practices. She is the creator of the well-received Women Rainmakers Roundtable. Prior to founding ClientFocus in 1995, Sara Holtz, a Harvard Law School graduate, practiced law in-house and was the first woman chairman of the Association of Corporate Counsel.

Sara Holtz has been featured in articles in *The American Lawyer*, *ABA Journal*, *USA Today*, the *Los Angeles* and *San Francisco Daily Journals*, *California Lawyer*, and other publications.

About the Women Rainmakers Roundtable

ClientFocus' Women Rainmakers Roundtable brings together top women partners who are committed to building their practices. In a supportive atmosphere, members learn what works and what doesn't when it comes to business development.

To learn more about the Women Rainmakers Roundtable or about Sara Holtz, visit <http://www.clientfocus.net> or call Sara Holtz at 916.797.1525.