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# Networking and Business Development in a Hybrid Business World

Some tips to improve your skills and build your business and become a rainmaker in the current business development environment.

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If we have learned anything in the last 20 months, we know we must be creative regarding business development and networking. It used to be relatively easy to get out there and meet people. Now you must learn to adapt to new rules and revised values in an ever-changing world.

As women, we have always felt we have had to be very careful about how we networked or developed business. If we seemed too interested, people might think we are pushy. But if we seemed too stoic, people might think we are not interested in their business. It's not easy to become a rainmaker—but it is something everyone can do and do well if they are willing to work at it. You must identify those potential contacts you would like to get to know and those areas of work you would like to expand. Then you must develop an objective approach to accomplishing those goals.

The two of us come from different backgrounds but similar roles—both professionals in what were (when we started) male-dominated industries, trying to do great work for our clients, bill hours, and make connections. We also used many of the same techniques to improve our business development, such as speaking, writing, and volunteering. The bottom line is that you need to invest in yourself to become better at business development. Doing great work is a sure-fire way to get a client to hire you again, but that is considered a basic requirement for just keeping the work. To expand your business, you need to do more than that. Below are some recommendations for how to improve your skills and become a better rainmaker in this hybrid business development environment.



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## Tips on Becoming a Rainmaker

- 1 Identify the actions you are best at doing, then spend some time honing those skills.** For example, you may be a good speaker, but you may want to consider taking a one- or two-day class in professional speaking—and get yourself on video—to improve that ability. You *will* see flaws in your “performance.” Learn from these, and work on them. This is especially true if you are doing much of your work virtually, where you will need to have good lighting and make sure your clothing colors work on screen. Refinements are always important. It is also valuable to *hear* how you sound. We don’t like to do that, but it will enable you to understand if you need to be more uplifting in your tone, if you speak too quickly, or if you sound too informal.
- 2 Reach out to people in your firm whom you see as great rainmakers and ask them for advice.** They will appreciate it and will provide you with a few kernels of knowledge. There are also plenty of good websites, blogs, books, and YouTube videos that can help you understand the fundamentals. Check out the book written by one of the coauthors of this article, Sarah J. Frost’s [\*POWER AT THE TABLE: Guide to Gaining Clients and Control—The Law Firm Marketing Maverick Teaches How to Develop Your Own Book of Business\*](#). There is no “one size fits all” in business development. Adapt what these resources recommend to what you are most comfortable with doing. You will find that even though they may recommend various techniques, the fundamentals are much the same.
- 3 Ask someone to help you with your business development practice.** This could be a friend, a colleague, or your partner. Test ideas. It always helps to have someone in your corner whom you trust to give you honest advice. Having a “marketing buddy” can provide a good source of moral support while holding you accountable to your goals.



- 4 **Make a list of all contacts by type: professional, personal, educational, and other.** Put them into categories in terms of how well you know them and how you might be able to help them. Providing value to your contacts is a key to getting them to both remember and consider you for work in the future.
- 5 **Share *relevant* information with your contacts.** Share professional information, or, if you know them well enough, share something personally helpful like an interesting new restaurant in a city or a travel tip or book. But make sure the information is *valuable* in their eyes, not yours. You always want to add value, not volume, to their lives.
- 6 **Get involved with associations that will help you connect with people who may buy your services.** Even competitors can be sources of referrals if they find you do good work and will make them look good from the referral. But make sure you really enjoy the work that the association is doing. Your time is limited, and you won't achieve anything by volunteering with an association where you don't feel a connection.
- 7 **Do something related to business development every day.** Even five minutes a day will get you in the habit. And don't just resort to email or text because that is the easiest. People respond to phone calls or in-person visits better than they do online contacts. The connections are more memorable and more meaningful in these days of endless digital incursions.
- 8 **Follow up, follow up, follow up.** Don't just meet someone and then expect that person to contact you—you need to lead, not follow. And again, whatever you follow up with must be something that resonates with the client. One thing that seems to work well is a personal handwritten note. We don't see many of these anymore, and they go a long way in this impersonal world.
- 9 **Calendar. Calendar. Calendar.** Put those five minutes per day on your to-do list to ensure that you don't forget in the crush of life and legal practice. Good intentions won't get you more business, but thoughtful follow-through will.

## More Tips

While the professional world has been on pandemic pause for the past 20 months, the long-term ramifications of failing to have one's own business has become more apparent. Those who have

business have options. Those who do not, do not. Everyone can develop work of their own, but not everyone is going to do that in the same way. You need to be intentional in the actions you take to network and to get business. On the other hand, no matter what you do, be sure to ask for the business. No one will know that you want their business if you don't ask them for it. And all the practice in the world won't get you that assignment if you don't let your client or contact know that you would like to have it.

Back in the era when the two of us began our professional practice, the concept of a woman rainmaker was considered “cute.” The rainmakers at law firms and professional service firms were indisputably male. The relationships that resulted in work assignments came from the bastions of male-only membership clubs and late-night poker games. That environment is, mercifully, now (mostly) a relic—“cute” in a different way. However, the imperative of developing business to have more control over your work life has never been more important than it is as we emerge from the shutdowns.

## Authors



### **ENTITY:**

**LITIGATION**

### **TOPIC:**

**PRACTICE MANAGEMENT, GENERAL PRACTICE, LITIGATION & TRIALS**

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