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Rainmaking Is a Team Sport: Fostering Business Development Across Your Firm

By George Brandon

When business development is normalized across the organization, it stops being a source of pressure or mystery and becomes a shared objective.

The myth of the rainmaker—an elusive, charismatic partner who single-handedly brings in clients—still haunts many law firms. But in today’s competitive legal landscape, this lone-wolf model no longer holds. The most successful firms understand that rainmaking isn’t a solo endeavor. It’s a team sport.

To thrive, business development (BD) must become a firm-wide mindset. Everyone—from junior associates to administrative staff—has a role to play. Here’s how to foster a culture where business development is collective, collaborative, and consistent.

BD as a Firm-Wide Mindset

Business development should not be a task for a few. It should be a strategic function embedded across the organization. When the message from leadership is clear—that everyone has a stake in growth—BD ceases to be a pressure point and becomes a point of pride.

Normalize BD activities as part of daily practice. Encourage curiosity about client industries, cross-practice collaboration, and shared responsibility for relationship-building. This cultural shift transforms your firm from reactive to proactive, and from siloed to synchronized.

Identifying Hidden Influencers Within Your Team

Often, client loyalty is influenced by those far from the spotlight. Receptionists, paralegals, and billing staff shape the client experience in crucial ways. Their responsiveness, tone, and professionalism leave lasting impressions.

Beyond client-facing roles, internal team members with deep community involvement or strong professional networks can be powerful connectors. Map your team's social capital by asking:

- Who gets regular praise from clients?
- Who has access to key circles in target industries?
- Who brings others together informally?

Identify these hidden influencers and support their potential as BD ambassadors.

Encouraging Associate Participation in Client Engagement

Associates may assume they have little to offer in BD—but only if you let them believe that. Integrate junior attorneys into client interactions early. Let them sit in on meetings, co-author alerts, and speak at client seminars. Assign industry research or client-specific insights to empower their contributions.

“BD can align with the strengths of younger attorneys—curiosity, writing, strategic thinking—if firms take time to train and involve them.”

Mentorship is key. Partners must model BD behaviors and make space for associates to participate. Formalize this through training programs that teach client development as a core competency.

Training and Incentivizing Collaborative BD Behaviors

Rainmaking shouldn't feel mysterious. Provide structured training on client engagement, ethical marketing, cross-selling, and industry research. Importantly, train teams together to reinforce the value of collaboration.

Incentives matter. Move away from credit-hoarding systems. Instead, recognize shared wins—joint pitches, co-authored articles, internal referrals. Reward behaviors that grow the firm, not just the individual book.

Firm-Wide BD Planning Templates

A collaborative BD culture needs shared tools. Here are a few frameworks that bring structure to firm-wide growth efforts:

- **Client Target Matrix:** Maps relationships and engagement plans.
- **Industry Focus Map:** Aligns efforts across high-potential sectors.
- **Content Calendar:** Coordinates firm visibility and thought leadership.
- **Pipeline Tracker:** Monitors opportunities and involved team members.

These templates keep BD activities visible and aligned.

Metrics for Team-Oriented BD Success

Origination credit still matters—it recognizes initiative and client acquisition. But in a collaborative firm culture, it should be one part of a broader, more nuanced performance picture.

Firms should expand their BD metrics to value both individual contributions and team-based efforts, such as:

- Number of co-led or cross-practice pitches
- Associate involvement in client development activities
- Client satisfaction that names multiple contributors
- Internal referrals and collaboration across departments
- Co-authored thought leadership and joint public speaking

Origination credit can be preserved and even enhanced by layering in bonus recognition or shared credit models for team wins. This ensures key rainmakers are rewarded while reinforcing that BD is most effective when it's a collective effort.

“Recognition reinforces the message: we succeed together—and we reward both leadership and collaboration.”

Make these metrics visible in partner meetings, performance reviews, and internal dashboards. Highlighting a diversity of contributions fosters a culture where everyone is motivated to participate in firm growth.

Conclusion: From Scarcity to Abundance

The era of the lone rainmaker is over. Clients want integrated teams. Attorneys want mentorship and opportunity. Firms need consistency and scalability.

By redefining rainmaking as a collective pursuit and giving your people the tools and encouragement to contribute, you move from a model of BD scarcity to one of shared abundance—and long-term, sustainable growth.

George Brandon is President of **Legalxcellence LLC**, a consultancy specializing in lawyer recruiting, business development and marketing strategies for law firms. He advises attorneys on how to build their book of business, client retention, digital branding, and ethical growth strategies. He can be reached at george@legalxcellence.com.