

# freshout

SUSAN SALTONSTALL DUNCAN • TIPS & TACTICS FOR NEW LAWYERS

## Setting the Stage for Personal Marketing Success

If you are fresh out of law school and new to private practice, you've probably been told to spend the first few years concentrating on becoming technically knowledgeable in your legal skills. This is first-rate advice, with a caveat: You should also start developing a personal marketing strategy. Even your early success will depend on the approach you take to client service, the way in which you focus and promote your areas of expertise, your interactions with the people you encounter and the relationships you nurture.

Business development, because so much of it is relationship-based, requires a significant amount of personal time and involvement. It is an active process that, for the most part, cannot be delegated to someone else. You need to be prepared to make the necessary commitment, even in the hustle and bustle of your first priority, developing your substantive lawyering skills. The good news is that once you

develop good personal marketing strategies and habits, you will be better able to control your destiny, eventually doing more of the kind of work you most enjoy for the types of partners and clients you most enjoy.

### **Become Client-Centered: Think Broad and Deep**

From the outset, you must focus on achieving a broad and deep understanding of your client base as well as the general marketplace. Begin by asking questions of the partners who assign projects to you. Inquire about each client's business and strategic goals; its industry, management style and culture; its history with the firm; and its expectations for the timing and outcome of the legal strategies being used.

In addition, find out who is on the client's team at every level. Nurture relationships with them, even if they're not the major decision makers with whom your firm's partners have relationships.

Also, as you increase your direct contact with clients, always ask questions about their business, their personal successes and frustrations, trends in their industry and related threats and opportunities.

### **Track Trends and Identify Your Niche**

Even as a new lawyer, you bring added value to your firm and its clients by developing special skills and areas of

expertise. Your chosen niche might be a specific area of substantive law, a particular type of client in a specific industry or a certain type of case or matter in which you seek to build a track record. The key is to become—and remain—aware of trends affecting your practice area, your clients or your clients' industries.

The most successful rainmakers are constantly looking to spot new trends and client needs before their competitors do. They are able to position or reposition their expertise to respond to fresh openings or voids. Look ahead for economic threats or opportunities and political or regulatory shifts that may affect your clients by reading the business press, visiting industry Web sites and talking to clients and other business colleagues outside your firm. Always look for strategies to protect against a downturn or fungible services (ones in which there are hundreds, or even thousands, of lawyers who provide the same service you do, perhaps for less money).

### **Market to Internal Sources of Business**

Some of your best marketing targets are the partners and peers in your firm. Develop rapport and respect with your colleagues, get to know their practices, learn about their clients and share your respective business development goals and strategies. Think of opportunities



Susan Saltonstall Duncan (sduncan@rainmakingoasis.com) is President of RainMaking Oasis, Inc., a marketing and management firm that provides planning, consulting and training tools to lawyers and law firms. She can be reached at (203) 318-0083.



need your knowledge and skill level. These assignments are opportunities to pass on your expertise and knowledge to less-experienced people and help them grow professionally.

### Considering the Details

Once you have assessed your list of projects, take the next steps. Begin by writing a description of each project to be delegated, including all the various subordinate pieces. Writing it out has two purposes:

- First, as you review what you have written, it alerts you to whether there are any pieces missing from the assignment.

- Second, it allows you to give a written description of the project to your delegatee. (Pieces are invariably missed when one describes a project orally.)

As you read your description, think about the skills, abilities and knowledge necessary to take on and complete this project. Also, consider your vision of this project's success. What would the outcome be if everything were done as you would like?

Lastly, consider the timeline for completing the entire project. What is a realistic amount of time for finishing the various tasks involved?

### Assessing the Delegatee's Characteristics

For each project to be assigned, think about the individuals to whom you can delegate. Is there a specific person who has the characteristics necessary for this job? For example, if the assignment requires dealing with a client, are you comfortable having a particular subordinate be involved in client contacts?

Consider the individual's level of experience in relation to the project. What kind of training will she need to

accomplish this assignment? What are his strong points and weak spots? Knowing the strengths, weaknesses and working styles of your staff plays an important role in delegating. Without this knowledge, you will never feel comfortable delegating particular tasks. Also, the chance of delegating to an individual who's inappropriate for a given assignment is much greater.

### Making Communication the Key

The biggest pitfall in delegating is a lack of communication between the one assigning the project and the person doing the work. If you don't properly describe the assignment, state the expectations and give complete information, resources and advice, you are setting the assignment up for failure. The more information you give up front, the fewer questions the person will need to ask during the assignment.

Importantly, however, two-way communication needs to continue *throughout* the assignment, not just at the beginning. Depending on the complexity of tasks involved and the level of the delegatee's experience, regularly scheduled check-ins may be necessary. Be sure you talk with the delegatee about the best way to ask questions and give status reports during the project.

### Finding New Challenges

One of the major reasons we have employees is to lessen our own workloads, giving us more time for greater involvement with business development, strategic planning and other types of work that challenge and satisfy us. Delegating to others allows those individuals, in turn, to learn new skills, face new challenges and contribute more substantially to the organization. These are all key ingredients for a happy and productive workplace. <sup>1P</sup>

## Action Plan

- Describe the delegated assignment fully—and put it in writing. Include tasks to be accomplished, useful resources, timelines and your vision of the project's successful completion.
- Know the characteristics of your staff—their strengths, weaknesses and work styles. Consider which assignments will add to their professional development, regardless of their current role in the workplace.
- Expect mistakes. You made them as you were learning—your delegatee will make them, too. How you help your people learn from their mistakes is the important task here.
- Communicate fully to ensure the assignment is done successfully and the person has an opportunity for professional development.
- Make it clear that you're available for questions and advice throughout the project. The assignment will be completed faster, with fewer errors, and the person will have the benefit of your knowledge, which will serve him or her well in the next assignment.
- Don't micromanage. That's not delegating. That's just doubling your work—and it does not enable the delegatee to learn to take on greater responsibility.

### RESOURCES

- *How to Delegate* by Robert Heller and Tim Hindle. DK Essential Managers Series, 1997.
- *If You Want It Done Right, You Don't Have to Do It Yourself: The Power of Effective Delegation* by Donna M. Genett. Quill Driver, 2003.
- *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen R. Covey. Simon & Schuster, 1990.



and contacts to benefit others in their marketing and sales efforts.

It's also important to develop good internal service skills, especially reliability and responsiveness. Become proficient at project management and delegation by establishing priorities and communicating with support personnel. Ask supervising lawyers for feedback on your efforts to be sure they and external clients are satisfied with your service and work product.

### **Know and Articulate What You Have to Sell**

Once you've begun to develop expertise in a niche, be prepared to describe what you do in a way that focuses on the value you can bring to clients. Prepare and practice an "elevator speech"—a one-sentence description that conveys, in clear lay terms, what you do for specific types of clients and the benefits you provide.

Make sure your bio on the firm's Web site and in other marketing materials reflects your expertise in terms of services, industries, client types, articles you have written and industry groups to which you belong.

### **Promote Your Expertise Internally and Externally**

Let your colleagues know exactly what you do and how it can help their clients. Circulate memos, advisories or articles to help keep them informed about the trends and important cases you're tracking.

Find out what types of association events and networking forums the partners or senior associates in your practice niche attend. Ask to accompany them to relevant events and introduce yourself to their contacts. Actively seek opportunities to publish articles and give presentations on your area of expertise. Initially, this may be easiest

to do in bar association forums—but you'll get much more value from promoting your expertise to referral sources such as accountants, bankers, real estate developers and prospective clients, not to other lawyers.

### **Grow and Nurture Your Network of Contacts**

Most new business inquiries and referrals come from individuals, not companies or organizations—meaning that business development is based on one-to-one relationships and face-to-face interactions. That's a very good reason to develop a contacts database that includes the people you already know. In your initial database, include existing clients, former classmates and summer associates, professors, law school deans and personal acquaintances. Then, over time, you'll want to add to this list—but you'll also want to narrow your active contacts to those with whom you have some mutual business interest or synergy.

Begin to interact with key contacts on a regular basis. Get out and meet someone for lunch at least two or three times a month, to catch up on business news and trends. Send article clippings, personal notes and e-mails to your contacts, and touch base by phone. Staying on your contacts' radar screens and asking for updates on their business perspectives will facilitate more interactions and inquiries.

### **Be a Player: Show Your Interest in Business Development**

The sooner you start demonstrating an active interest in marketing, spotting new trends and building business opportunities, the sooner you'll be viewed as a potential rainmaker who adds value to the firm. Attend the marketing programs and events hosted by your firm. Talk to partners

about the firm's strategic goals and its current marketing priorities and initiatives. See if there are ways to get involved in the firm's marketing activities, and offer to research prospective clients, draft articles or prepare for seminars. Start thinking of yourself as an entrepreneur and rainmaker, and others will, too. **LP**

## Checklist

### **Strategies for Marketing Yourself**

- Develop a customer-centered mindset. Talk to clients and put yourself in their shoes when thinking through legal and business strategies and future needs.
- Focus on the outside marketplace. Read periodicals and track Web sites to identify trends, threats and opportunities. And get out of your office and talk to people.
- Find and spend time with a rainmaker mentor—someone whose marketing style and personality you admire.
- Find a marketing "buddy"—someone with whom you can meet every few weeks to share business development ideas, successes and challenges.
- Capitalize on your relationships with firm colleagues, clients and other business and social contacts. Find ways to share information, introductions and value.
- Engage in marketing activities that you enjoy, and take one action step every day.