

Commentary

Future rainmakers should build networks now

By Dawn Wagenaar

Because they've grown up with a lot of communication tools, young attorneys often have a natural instinct for building social networks. This strength, however, may not be leveraged by the firm until it is "time" for those attorneys to bring in business — traditionally when they are promoted to a more senior position.

There is nothing traditional about the coming decades in our labor pool, however. To prepare themselves well for leadership, attorneys in their 20s and early 30s need to take the initiative now to build a network of professional contacts. This is key for future business development as well as for their careers.

Here are a few ways that they can prepare themselves for success.

Shadow the rainmaker

Most firms have an open-door policy for attorneys to explore professional development. One area where young attorneys could gain valuable experience is to participate in a prospect or client meeting. Watching an experienced attorney in action can bring valuable perspectives to young attorneys for negotiation, presenting the strengths of the firm and navigating challenges and objections.

If scheduling allows and the meeting is a good fit, a younger attorney could attend a meeting once a month. Better yet, the younger attorney could do some research on the prospect or client and

come prepared with questions — reviewed by the senior attorney — appropriate to the goals of the meeting. Plan for a short discussion afterward about what the senior attorney thought went well and what could have gone better.



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Choose events carefully

Senior attorneys and partners can get too busy to attend key networking or trade association events regularly. By sending younger attorneys to a few meetings in their place, the firm still has a presence and the attorneys get practice at building contacts.

One of the problems with traditional networking venues is that many members may already have established relationships. But senior attorneys can help by introducing younger attorneys to their contacts. It creates a positive impression of growth and mentorship at your firm. If they go alone, younger attorneys can seek an organizer or ambassador to "make the rounds" with them.

Joining a committee or participating in an event can also lead to new contacts.

More organizations are establishing young professionals groups. The advantage is that many of the attorneys will be at a similar point in their careers and are open to developing relationships today that may not bear fruit for a few years. Don't just look for attorney groups; branch out into referral groups that may include CPAs, financial advisors or others who support the practice area.

Before attending an event, set a goal: to meet one new financial planner or to find

a CPA who practices in real estate transactions. This provides a focus while mingling.

Network online

The latest form of networking is virtual. Law firm websites and really all professional service sites are becoming the hub of marketing. Firms can develop interactive features that encourage visitors to return for more information through resource sections, articles and blogs.

These information sources can be valuable to younger attorneys for anticipating trends in their practice areas. It might seem daunting to add online reading to the stack of publications that arrive each month, so they should bookmark only those that are enjoyable to read and/or seem to offer a pulse of the industry.

Posting comments on blogs can be another valuable form of networking, but take time to learn about the blog source before posting. Every attorney should also be aware of rules or limits on posting comments or mentioning the firm online.


Focus on service

The best networkers and rainmakers are those who understand the secret of sales: service. Their goal is not to bring money into the firm; it is to serve clients well so the money follows. The best contact databases are those that include professional and community contacts: mortgage lenders and landscapers to chiro-

practitioners and caterers. When the prospect or client mentions a need of any kind, younger attorneys can set themselves apart by offering these connections.

Regular contact with prospects and clients is the surest way to increase the number of services provided. Because people are busy, "regular" can mean every three or four months. Younger attorneys can gain mileage here by avoiding the "How's business?" line. This can be construed as wasting the client's time.

Instead, they should ask specific questions related to trends or news they've read about in trade publications or on industry websites. As a courtesy, they can attach the article or information to which they refer and mention something about how the firm is addressing it.

Not all of these ideas can be implemented simultaneously. In order to prepare for the all-too-soon departure of leadership in your firm, younger attorneys must power up sooner rather than later. 

Dawn Wagenaar is a principal with Ingenuity Marketing Group in St. Paul, a marketing, training and PR firm for professional services and the host of Power Up! professional matchmaking events for professionals 35 and younger. She can be reached at: (651) 690-3358 or by e-mail at www.ingenuitymarketing.com/powerup-info.html. Check out the Power Up! blog at www.powerupblog.com.

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Court News

Vacancies announced on 7th District bench

The Commission on Judicial Selection has announced that applications are being accepted for two 7th Judicial District trial court bench vacancies. The first vacancy will occur with the retirement of Judge John E. Pearson on Sept. 7, 2007. The Minnesota Supreme Court certified the chambers of this judgeship for the city of Alexandria in Douglas County. The second judgeship is a new position created by the 2007 Minnesota Legislature (2007 Minnesota Laws, Chapter 54, Article 1, Section 5), which takes effect on Jan. 1, 2008. The Supreme Court has certified the chambers of this position for the city of Little Falls in Morrison County.

Licensed Minnesota attorneys who are residents of the 7th Judicial District may request an application for either position by calling John Hultquist at (651) 296-0019, via e-mail at john.hultquist@state.mn.us or by writing: Eric J. Magnuson, Chair, Commission on Judicial Selection, 130 State Capitol, 75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd., St. Paul, MN 55155.

All candidates must submit an application and letters of recommendation to the above address. They must be received no later than 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Aug. 7, 2007. 

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Administration

Joann Barquest Associate Publisher
.....612-584-1536
.....joann.barquest@finance-commerce.com
Subscription Services800-451-9998

Editorial

Mark A. Cohen Editor-In-Chief
.....612-584-1531
.....mark.cohen@minnlawyer.com
Barbara L. Jones Associate Editor
.....612-584-1543
.....barbara.jones@minnlawyer.com
Michelle Lore Associate Editor
.....612-584-1530
.....michelle.lore@minnlawyer.com
Dan Heilman Associate Editor
.....612-584-1556
.....dan.heilman@minnlawyer.com
Shari Guhl Design & Production Specialist
.....612-584-1529
.....shari.guhl@minnlawyer.com

Michael Krieger Special Sections Editor
.....612-584-1554
.....michael.krieger@finance-commerce.com
Sherri Knuth Opinion Digest Writer
.....612-333-4244

Advertising

Jeanne Reiland Advertising Sales Manager
.....612-584-1535
.....jeanne.reiland@finance-commerce.com
Jane Denny Classified Advertising
.....612-584-1533
.....jane.denny@finance-commerce.com
Sheila Bennett Display Advertising
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.....sheila.bennett@finance-commerce.com
Gena Marie Johnston Display Advertising
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.....gena.johnston@finance-commerce.com
Maggi McDermott Display Advertising
.....612-584-1557
.....maggi.mcdermott@finance-commerce.com
David Seawell Display Advertising
.....612-584-1545
.....david.seawell@finance-commerce.com

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