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## Be The Go-To Associate In Your Firm

By [Dawn Wagenaar](#) on July 26, 2008 @ 7:35 pm in [Law Associates](#) | [Comments Disabled](#)

You talk to your friends and colleagues at other law firms. You probably know about the culture at the firms, the personalities of the partners and the partnership tracks. If you are a younger associate, you might even know the salary scales.

With a growing population of lawyers in their 50s and 60s who are looking toward retirement, firms across the country are figuring out how to retain clients and maintain profitability through a major leadership transition. Some of their strategies have included opening branch offices in the U.S. and other countries, diversifying practice areas and hiring less expensive paralegals to do the work that was previously done by associates.

Partnership tracks have lengthened and there is no longer a guarantee that you will be offered a partnership. Whether or not you want a partnership, you should know how to get noticed and be the beneficiary of a partner's mentorship and book of business.

### Make Connections

Go-To Associates understand the importance of relationships inside and outside the firm. By observing the dynamics of the firm, they understand who has power. It is often just as important to relate well to the managing partner's legal assistant as it is to your practice manager. Continue to talk to your peers in the legal field and referral fields such as accounting and finance. This is important for your career as well as future business development as your peers gain influence.

### Ask For Opportunities

Some associates are comfortable taking orders; others assume they won't get an opportunity until a partner leaves or retires. Waiting around for rain isn't a good idea in any career. Ask to sit in on client meetings. Come up with a list of blog ideas geared toward young associates and recruitment and suggest them to the bloggers in your firm. Offer to set up or update a partner's Facebook profile. Ask partners for work beyond your caseload or professional development plan. If you are open to it, ask about opportunities in branch offices. Sincere requests communicate motivation and initiative to firm leaders.

### Be Visible, Not Overworked

You can demonstrate initiative without working 80 hours a week. Volunteer for firm committees and events or play on the softball team. Respond to emails in the evening or on weekends, which can subtly communicate a strong work ethic and time management. You can write for firm publications and pass on articles of interest to your team. Ask colleagues or your practice manager to lunch to build rapport. Actively participate in young professionals groups and industry associations.

Yes, these ideas are primarily non-billable. But they are common-sense professional development strategies that are easy to overlook when you are busy taking orders. Firm leaders are thinking about their exit strategy constantly; their thoughts will fall to the associates who are top of mind. If you were them, who would be your Go-To Associate in the firm? Be that person.

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