

Law Schools

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Get Smart, **Stand Out** and Position Yourself For **Law Firm Success**

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Let's face it. It's not an easy time to be a law student. Not only is the job market for new lawyers soft, many law students summer, and hope to ultimately land, at firms that continue to cut associate bonuses, decrease base pay and lay off the rank and file. Even if a law student secures a dream spot, the truth is—and firms don't mention this on

summer booze cruises around Manhattan—it doesn't get easier down the road. It's not just the high pressure and long hours. Today, firms expect more than just great work product. Firms want business generators to materialize out of the young lawyer ether.

Don't despair. Do what a law student does best: Arm yourself with knowledge and position yourself for the best possible result. Here are some basic ways to get smart, stand out and add value to your law firm home.

Know the Market

Witness the elbows-out jockeying for summer spots and it's clear that law students

know which firms are the best of the best. But beyond lore and cliché, do you know *why* those firms command such respect? Are you aware of the changes in the marketplace? Apart from what firms are lowering starting salaries, do you know which firms are on a meteoric rise and why? How service delivery is changing? Can you talk about the globalization of legal services, for instance, knowing those firms that have expanded their footprint successfully? Are you aware of recent mega-matters and what firms handle them? Yes, there's much to know. And this is a time of learning, not necessarily knowing. So get in the habit of *reading everything*. Make www.law.com your

landing page and read it every single day. Stay abreast of the surveys generated by the trade publications such as reports on who represents whom, the AmLaw 100, 200, Global 100 ... Also be sure to check out the market surveys put out by organizations like Altman Weil, which may just be the McKinsey of the legal marketplace. If you're leaning toward litigation, Fulbright & Jaworski commissions a litigation trends survey each year and it's jam-packed with interesting and important data. The net-net here is simple: Read everything, all the time.

Know the Business

Just as the law firm job market cannot support the number of law school grads, the market for legal services is hugely oversaturated. As in-house law departments struggle with their budgets, more work is staying in-house and general counsels seek to capitalize on volume pricing by shrinking their list of go-to firms. The fierce competition has been a game-changer in the way law firms engage in business. Firms are forced to get beyond the free CLEs and secondments that sweetened a pitch in years past. Now, they must offer aggressive pricing and creative fee arrangements that run anathema to the conventional models of leverage and hourly billing. Did you know, for instance, that a growing number of clients will not pay for first years' time? Think about it. Wow. The point is, business development, which used to amount to sport socials over golf and baseball games, is increasingly sophisticated and substantive. While many firms still cling stubbornly to WordPerfect (which is probably a foreign brand to today's law students), forward-thinking firms are using technology to transform their operations and their service offering. Think about these issues and you'll start to think like an owner.

Understand Partners

The owners. Boy, partners can really inspire fear in the firm's young lawyers. Do your best to throw some understanding in the mix. The fact is, getting arms around the universe in which *the partners* operate will insulate young lawyers from terror and inspire them to support and succeed. The stakes are high and partner tensions are pretty straightforward: Clients demand extraordinary service for less money and firm leadership wants more hours and more money. Regardless of a firm's prestige, a partner sending out a whopping bill at month's end likely feels pretty anxious about it. When the weekly emails go out to shareholders about fee receipts, nerves and competition soar. When the Management

Committee turns on the heat because a client is a slow payer and the receivable is enormous, it can be really uncomfortable. Every single day, partners need to balance their care and feeding of clients against the care and feeding of their firm. It's brutal. The Internet has a zillion articles on partner compensation, structure and economics, the leverage model ... you name it. Again, read everything you can and you'll find yourself better positioned to relate to the bosses.

Whether it's mountain climbing or adult softball or a wine group or community service organizations ... **clients with shared interests will find you.** And, your circle of friends will find you clients.

Cultivate Passions

When we encourage young lawyers to get passionate, we are talking about two different areas—work and play—but both serve the lawyer in the end. While it's never a good idea to specialize too early, eventually lawyers discover that it's mission critical to build a reputation as a go-to practitioner in a specific area. Marketers say over and over again that it's better to go an inch wide and a mile deep than a mile wide and an inch deep. So as you get to work, have passion as a top-of-mind consideration. When you identify the issue or specialty or industry you'd like to own, dive in. Build a plan. Share it with your partners. They will heartily support the entrepreneurial drive. Second, insofar as client development rests on relationships, keep in mind that passionate people are interesting and magnetic. Whether it's mountain climbing or adult softball or a wine group or community service organizations ... **clients with shared interests will find you.** And, your circle of friends will find you clients.

Write Like a Human Being

You spend three years learning to write like a lawyer. Spend some time unlearning it. As you progress in your career, you will spend more and more time on marketing writing—things like client alerts, white papers, bylines and blog posts. Remember that non-lawyers and former lawyers do not speak your language. Speak *theirs*. Even in-house counsel abandoned "herein," "wherein" and "heretofore" when they transitioned into a business environment. Save

your legalese for your legal documents. When educating a client audience on a particular issue, development or case, focus on the real-world implications. Forget citations. Forget chronicling each stage of litigation. Get to the point in simple and clear language. If you orient your communications to clients, you send a powerful statement about how you think about and how you value the client relationship.

Stay Connected

When working with law firm partners, we regularly hear about their unbelievable contacts ... *but we lost touch years ago. It would be so awkward to reach out now.* The digital age just may be the best thing that's ever happened to professional service marketing. With the advent of social media and the smart phone, there is little excuse to lose contact. With anyone. Law school classmates, the associate class, neighbors, family friends ... many of these people will one day be in a position to refer or give you business. Stay in touch with everyone. Learn to ask for help. And help everyone you can. Rainmakers hold fast to fundamental sandbox principles: Be nice. Be helpful. Be a good friend.

Clients First

In high intensity environments—and the practice of law is chief among them—it's easy to get parochial. To look inward. To focus on the deadline or the partner breathing down your neck or the highly-political colleagues who seem to outshine you at every turn. Young lawyers will be best served by a mindset that puts clients' needs first. And, in seeking out a mentor or champion, look for partners who are obsessed with client service. Model that dedication. While peers will focus on impressing partners, focus on delivering for clients. If your end game is to add value to the client relationship at every turn, everything else falls into place.

Yes, it's a jungle out there. But if law students can read 250 pages about the escheat doctrine in a single evening, you already have the brains and the endurance to survive. Just pay attention to the soft stuff of your craft and you'll become a rainmaking powerhouse that firms will scramble to hire.