
Professional Development

THE IMPORTANCE OF GETTING RECOGNIZED

Nobody likes a braggart. Many of us have been taught that since childhood. But today, to be successful in a small or solo practice, in-house or in public service, attorneys must generate confidence and command the respect of clients and other lawyers.

"It is this fear that no one will like you if you promote yourself that keeps many young attorneys from successfully managing their careers," said career advisor M.J. Tocci of Trial Run, Inc., who spoke before an audience of mid-level associates attending last April's Professional Development Breakfast Workshop titled: "Getting Into the Spotlight: Increasing Your Exposure and Authority Within (and Outside) the Firm."

"The simple truth," says Tocci, "is that most people do not know about your work even when it is outstanding, and that people form impressions in large part from what you tell them. So it is important to seek out opportunities to tell people about your work and your achievements."

Self-promotion

Although many attorneys are uncomfortable with the idea of self-promotion, if you don't promote yourself, warns Tocci, you will fall behind the people that do. "The trick to self promotion," says Tocci, "is to do it in a way that is interesting."

If you want to let someone know about a great success, you should talk about it with passion and enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is not arrogance, says Tocci, it simply demonstrates that you love your work and you take pride in what you have done.

Plan what you will say ahead of time and don't rely on spontaneous brilliance. This way, when a partner asks you in the elevator what are you working on, you have a ready-made speech. By being prepared and practicing, says Tocci, you will become more comfortable talking about yourself and your achievements.

The benefits of effective self-promotion are enormous, stresses Tocci. It helps you get work assignments, promotions and raises. It allows you to build crucial connections and receive business development opportunities and referrals. Most importantly, it allows you to experience the motivation that such recognition provides.

Getting into the spotlight

Once you have mastered the act of self-promotion you can use it as a tool to get into the spotlight within your organization.

Regularly update your boss or supervisor on your work progress. Identify work you have done that has relevance for others within your firm, and have your successes published in the firm or company newsletter. "Remember to

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keep a file of every success, accomplishment and achievement, no matter how small," said Tocci. "Also keep a record of compliments and expressions of gratitude from clients and colleagues."

In the law-firm world, one of the most important factors for achieving success is getting the right assignments. In order to get those plum assignments, says Tocci, first identify who needs to be made aware of the kind of opportunities you are seeking. Then let them know

why you should be the one to receive them and how your participation in a matter will benefit the whole team. "The best assignments don't often land on your desk. You have to ask for what you want," said Tocci.

You must be persuasive when asking for that choice assignment, he advises. The style of your speech says a lot about your competence and confidence. Try not to hedge, hesitate or be over-polite. These characteristics make you appear less powerful. Instead, try to be concise, speak slowly and clearly, make eye contact and present your ideas authoritatively. Do not minimize what your contribution would be.

Finally, don't take no for an answer. Think of it instead as a first step in a negotiation, says Tocci. Then ask yourself, What do I need to do next to get a "yes," like further identifying your strengths, offering additional solutions or gathering the support of others.

Speak up

Another way to move into the spotlight at work is to make yourself heard at meetings. "Speak up when you have something to say," says Tocci. "Try to be among the first to speak and don't discount what you are saying."

You can also move into the spotlight through writing, speaking and teaching engagements. When you have articles published, send them to clients and use them as handouts. Be open to, and pursue, speaking opportunities. Join bar associations or other professional groups where you can speak at seminars or continuing legal education programs. Make sure people know about your enthusiasm and availability to speak.

"It is by becoming a self-promoter," says Tocci, "and identifying the activities that showcase your strengths that you take ownership of your own career."

**NEW YORK
CITY BAR**

Forty-Fourth Street Notes
September 2006