



“Rainmaking for Junior Women Associates”

Summary of November 3, 2010 panel

A panel of experienced attorneys and consultants provided rainmaking advice to more than 70 women attorneys at the City Bar on November 3rd. Panelists were: Eve Birnbaum, principal, Eve Birnbaum Associates; Susan Dwyer, partner, Herrick, Feinstein LLP; Susan Kohlmann, partner, Jenner & Block LLP; Terri Mazur, partner, Mayer Brown LLP; and Melissa McClenaghan Martin, president, M3 Strategic Alliances.

The panel was geared toward helping junior female associates at large and medium firms take charge of their careers at an early stage. The panel noted that women attorneys unfortunately lag behind their male peers in both law firm partnership and rainmaking: women represent only 15% of equity partners at the nation’s largest firms, and, at nearly 50% of the nation’s largest firms, women are not among the firms’ top 10 rainmakers.

The program provided advice on three areas: (i) raising your internal profile, (ii) external networking and (iii) gender differences in rainmaking styles.

Raising Your Internal Profile

Because of the economic downturn, the traditional law firm partnership model has changed. Firms no longer had enough business to occupy “service partners,” and the profession watched as partners without significant books of business were de-equitized or “invited” to leave their firms. As the recession made clear, merely being an excellent lawyer is no longer enough. Firms are increasingly requiring all of their partners to be business developers as well.

The panel noted that an important first step toward becoming a rainmaker is to raise your profile within your firm. The panel recommended the following:

- Strive for excellence. Do good work. Continually develop your skill set.
- Develop an expertise and be the best at it.
- Work with enthusiasm. Choose work that you love, and show that you enjoy doing it.
- Be creative and intellectually curious, and show initiative.

- Be diagnostic: Do a lot of listening. Treat the partners with whom you work as your clients: stay on their radar, remind them of your professional interests and ask them for work directly.

Networking: Male v. Female Styles

The panel cited studies and shared personal experience about some common gender differences when cultivating business relationships. Women, for example, tend to have deep but narrow networks, while men have broad and shallow ones. Shallow but broad networks tend to be the ones which help individuals advance within their firms.

Studies also show that men are more likely to take “stretch” assignments than their female peers, saying yes to assignments even though they may not feel completely qualified for them. These stretch assignments help position attorneys for advancement.

The panel offered the following frank advice:

- Be a risk taker and say, “yes” to challenging plum assignments. Seek out challenging work.
- Opt to have several mentors rather than being tied to one or two attorneys at your firm.
- Align yourself with key power players, those people who will advocate for your advancement and who have real authority within the firm.
- Be a good, proactive listener.
- Be willing to be the ‘token’ woman at events or meetings and then be brilliant.

Raising Your External Profile

Finally, a number of practical pointers were provided to assist junior women associates in developing an external network. These include:

- Dedicate time in your daily schedule for establishing and maintaining professional relationships.
- Be a resource for and a “connector” to people in your network.
- Ask “what are next steps?” at the end of a pitch meeting or proposal.
- Ask for the business.
- If you did not get the assignment or the business, find out why.
- Clients give business to *people* that they like, not firms.
- Prioritize. For example, rather than joining five organizations as a passive member, join one organization and be active and take on a leadership role.
- Designate time during the week for business development activities.
- Do work that you love and show your enthusiasm.

The panel noted that most junior women associates already have the skills to nurture relationships, but that they simply need to develop the confidence to make it happen.

5-Point Wrap-Up

Finally, as a wrap-up to the Program, one of the panelists recited five top tips from an ABA publication on the subject of rainmaking. The panelists all agreed that these rang true from their personal experiences.

1. **First and Always: Be An Excellent Lawyer.** The best and most reliable way to attract clients is by being a first-rate legal advisor. Approach every assignment with the objective of doing your very best work. "If you build it, they will come..."
2. **Watch, Listen and Learn.** As young practitioners you are surrounded by more experienced lawyers. Some will be models to try to emulate and others will be models of what you don't want to emulate. Take every opportunity to observe lawyers doing what they do: negotiating deals or settlements, taking depositions, trying cases and interacting with clients. Absorb what makes the successful ones successful and learn from those that falter so you can avoid those same missteps in the future.
3. **Develop New Friendships and Cultivate the Old.** Note the word "friendships." Make "friends" with everyone you meet in the sense that you make a good impression. Successful rainmaking depends on developing and maintaining relationships of trust.
4. **Use your Relationships to Connect People.** Think about introducing people you know to people you meet. Making these connections is a valuable way to build a network of people who will look for ways to help you, by making referrals or introductions.
5. **Be Enthusiastic About Your Work.** Clients and potential clients want to work with happy, enthusiastic people who enjoy themselves in their work. You will be a magnet for new business if you exhibit satisfaction, even joy, in what you do. Enthusiasm breeds confidence and confidence leads to good work and new business. Make it fun.

The article was drafted by Carroll Welch, Chair, Career Advancement and Management Committee and Committee members Eve Birnbaum and Melissa McClenaghan Martin.