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NEW YORK CITY BAR

Committee on Women in the Profession Event:

“Women Who Ask: How Successful Women Rainmakers Ask for and Bring in Business”

A rainmaker is a person who generates income for a business by brokering deals or attracting clients or funds. On October 10, at the New York City Bar Association, Vivia Chen (Senior Reporter at *The American Lawyer*) moderated a candid discussion with two women rainmakers, Sheila Birnbaum (Partner at Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan, LLP) and Nina Gussack (Partner at Pepper Hamilton LLP). Ms. Birnbaum and Ms. Gussack are seasoned rainmakers as evidenced by their reputation as “The Queen of Torts” and “The \$65 million woman” respectively.

Ms. Chen began the discussion by asking, “*What was it like to lose your business-getting virginity?*” Once the laughter subsided, the panelists eloquently began sharing their story and the conversation flowed effortlessly from there. The event was full of useful advice; below, I share a selection of their best tips.

Sheila Birnbaum’s Lessons:

- You never know where you are going to find business. Sometimes you have to do things that your firm might think is “a little nuts,” but if you have confidence in yourself, it is worth taking the risk.
- Talk to the associates. Take them out to lunch. They are going to grow up and be the top of the hierarchy one day, and they will remember that you were nice to them. People want to give business to people they like.
- You have to love what you do. If you want to go for the brass ring, it is a commitment of time that is enormous.
- It is very important to specialize and become an expert in a particular area of the law.
- *Good* associates are in demand. You have to speak up for yourself and show initiative. If you don’t, things will just continue the way they are.

Nina Gussack’s Advice:

- Getting your first client is like getting the first pickle out of the jar, it is the hardest one. The second and the third client are easier, but it is still difficult.
- Rejection is tough, but you cannot be afraid of it. Fear of rejection is your biggest impediment. You will get rejected more times than you will succeed. When you get rejected, don’t just “get over it.” Ask the company why they did not pick you. Then, you need to fill the gap so next time you get the job (e.g. being a better listener, or re-working your pitch).
- If you did not get a particular job, follow-up with your contact after a couple of months and ask how the case is going. If you start discussing the case and what *you* would have done (had they hired you), you are going to be the first person the company thinks of if they are not happy with the results of the lawyer they did hire.

- You need to “AFTB”—*Ask for the business*. You don’t directly ask for business, but that has to be your frame of mind. You can become a subject matter expert, give lectures, write articles, or discuss relevant topics with people you meet so you will be noticed and remembered.
- Know what your clients or potential clients care about and determine if you are being responsive to their interests.
- Another way to get business is to connect two people you know. Share the business with your colleagues.
- Young associates (who do not pitch to the potential client) should pitch to the partner on the case. It is good practice. The partner is your client when you are a young associate.
- Women are great listeners and have strong intuition. Use these innate skills during your pitch to potential clients.
- Advice to women lawyers: *Get in the game and stay in the game*. It takes commitment. It is not a short race; it is a marathon and you need to pace yourself.

Ms. Gussack shared a story she read in a New York Times article honoring Yogi Berra. Yogi’s granddaughter, Lindsay, told Yogi that she reported an article about a handsome tennis player. Yogi told her to date him. “Gramps,” Lindsay said, “He dates a swimsuit model.” Yogi replied, “You got swimsuits.”

Everyone has a swimsuit. This swimsuit represents our skills and our ability to do the job well and to achieve success. So ladies, suit up.

Article written by Kathleen Kelly, New York Law School Class of 2014, law student member of the Committee on Women in the Profession, October 2013.