

Rainmaking: The Hammer to Break the Glass Ceiling for Women Lawyers

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Yes, Virginia, there is a glass ceiling in law firms. We know that women start to leave in their 4th or 5th year, with the result that only 17 percent of partners at major law firms are women, according to the National Association of Law Placement. (The same obstacles face lawyers of color.) The primary reason is that law is still a white men's club – often a legal locker room with little support for ladies without a book of business.

“As a practical matter, rainmaking skills play a large part in the ability to advance and succeed, especially in private practice,” said Christine Cartwright Baker, a rainmaker and partner for 15 years at Drinker, Biddle & Reath. She recently took the post of Vice President of Litigation for Realogy Corp. Legal Department in Parsippany, N.J. “More business development means that women are more likely to have a voice, be appointed to key internal committees.”

The turnover is costing law firms millions of dollars, as they invest in bringing along women associates only to see them go just as they become profitable to the firm. From a strictly economic viewpoint, it's bad for business to lose the valuable women lawyers. It makes much more sense to teach women business development skills, so that they will enjoy success and generate more revenue for their firms.

What women lawyers really need are female mentors who can demonstrate how to open a new file from a current client; they are not getting this career-making advice from the old-boy's club of senior lawyers. The cure – and the hammer to break the glass ceiling – is to train women lawyers to generate new business and get more clients. A lawyer with enough clients to keep herself and several associates busy is a valuable asset to a law firm.

My point is that law firms must begin to offer women lawyers support in business development. Marketing certainly isn't taught in law school, to the fury of lawyers everywhere Rainmakers are not *born*, they are *trained*. A recent survey I conducted revealed that 73% of rainmakers took a course or training session in marketing *after* they began their law practice. See <http://tinyurl.com/2q4tp8>.

Following are several constructive ideas that law firms should adopt to reduce turnover among women lawyers, generate more business and thus boost firm revenue:

1. Underwrite the cost to send women lawyers to *several* business development training conferences, such as those sometimes offered by the bar association and regularly offered by the Legal Marketing Association.
2. Create a library of marketing and business development books in your firm's marketing department. Also, reimburse women lawyers for buying one of the many excellent books on rainmaking published by the American Bar Association. See <http://www.lawmarketing.biz/Store/> for an online collection of books, periodicals, video, multimedia and research.
3. Fund a women's business development initiative. Ms. Baker started her own women lawyer's networking group at her office. "It started off just meeting on a regular basis, just for lunch. We would talk about issues, but most importantly, ways that we could work together to develop business. Then, we started having networking events a couple times per year. We would invite women clients, potential clients and referral sources to our office for some sort of event. Once we had an expert on communication skills come in, and that was also popular. It gave us an opportunity to work together, to network among ourselves, and to network with clients and potential clients."
4. Assign a business development mentor to every woman lawyer. This can be a male or female rainmaker whose mission is to demonstrate their business-building skills to their protégé.
5. Always include a woman lawyer on a new-business call or response to an RFP. Of course, the woman lawyer must have a speaking role and play a part in the resulting new work.
6. Give women lawyers 200 hours a year of time to devote to business development, which can be credited to their annual billable hour target.
7. Provide women lawyers a complete list of trade associations in which the firm has a membership, and all charities and non-profits where the firm has a member on the Board. Underwrite the cost for women lawyers to become active in these organizations, where they will meet potential clients.
8. Introduce women associates to executives at major clients, so that the woman lawyer can cultivate relationships with junior executives at the client company.
9. Underwrite the cost of public speaking training for women lawyers, so that they can establish their credibility in front of an audience of clients. The firm's marketing team should seek out speaking engagements for the women lawyers.
10. Hire professional business development trainers to instruct *women* lawyers in getting new clients. The same skills that make men successful can be employed by women lawyers.

"Women can do business development," Ms. Baker said. "A lot of women are intimidated or overwhelmed because they picture business development as cold calls or

sales pitches, and not too many of us are comfortable doing that, including men. But that's not really the best way to develop business. On the contrary, the best rainmakers are people who are good at developing and nurturing relationships. That's a skill that most women have and are innately good at, so that's not something women need to learn. ”

A rising tide lifts all boats, but not if most of the women professionals are being torpedoed. It is in the enlightened self-interest of law firms to train their women lawyers to become rainmakers. Not only will the firm benefit, but the glass ceiling that stops the careers of women lawyers will be shattered.