

## Where New Business Comes From and How You Can Get It - Part 1 of 2

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Larry Bodine

First off, let me share some truths about rainmakers. They have achieved mythical status because of their seemingly magical and effortless ability to generate new business. It takes a small number (10% to 20% of all lawyers) to keep an entire law firm busy. They are the lawyers who run the firms they're at; they control their own destiny and they have high job satisfaction.

Now let's dispel the myths. Rainmaking:

- Is not a dark art, voodoo or the ability to hypnotize prospective clients.
- Does not require a charismatic personality, good looks or "silver hair at the temples."
- Does not require pitching, hitting on people or having a "sales" personality.
- Can easily be done by introverts. The gift of gab is not required.
- Has no downside. Rainmakers do not risk getting hung up on or having a door slammed in their face.

I've interviewed dozens of rainmakers of all kinds and found that they all one thing in common: *they have a lot of relationships*. Everyone in town seems to know them and they have everyone else's phone number and email address.

More importantly, rainmakers have an *owner* mentality. This means they are very good at what they practice, but they also realize they must keep themselves busy – plus a few other lawyers too. They are entrepreneurs who do not have an *employee* mentality – meaning that they don't regard coming to work as a *job* where *someone else* will give them assignments. They've evolved from being worker bees and into the lawyers who *give out* the assignments.

### Any lawyer can be a rainmaker

The good news is that any lawyer can be a business developer without changing their personality. All of the skills that make a person a good lawyer – being a good listener in a deposition, having an analytic mind when writing a brief, being a skilled questioner in court, being organized to juggle multiple files and being hard-working – are the same skills required of being a rainmaker. Rainmakers:

- Are good listeners in a new business meeting. They ask clients and prospective clients business questions and listen to the answers. They take a sincere interest and remember what they heard. Some of the best rainmakers are introverts who hate to be the center of attention; they deflect the spotlight by simply asking questions.

- Have analytical minds that can spot business development opportunities. For example, when a client mentions problems with “credit disputes,” the rainmaker hears “potential litigation.”
- Skillfully ask business questions like “how are you coping with the recession?” or “are your board members happy with the company’s results?” or “do you have a lot of foreign nationals working for you?” They are designed to get the other person talking about their business problems.
- Are organized and have a checklist of clients, referral sources and prospective clients to meet with.
- Equate business development with billable work. They know that the time they bill will determine their income, but the time spent on business development will determine their future.

### The four best sources of new business

Good business developers also know where to look for new files and clients. Those sources are, in order:

1. Current Clients
2. Referral Sources
3. Visibility in organizations of clients
4. Business executives you already know

Understand that business development is an *interviewing process* to determine if a client qualifies to do business with you. You are inquiring about people’s problems, golden opportunities, and what keeps them up at night. You also want to know if they plan to act on the problem, whether they have the authority to hire a lawyer, and whether they have a budget to pay you. But the basic idea is to get the other person to articulate a business or personal problem, which you can solve with legal services. Then all you have to say is, “I can help you” to turn a prospect into a client.

Business development for a lawyer is not “pitching,” or the kind of selling a used-car salesman does. Nobody likes being *sold to*. Think about the last time you went into a car dealership – the salesman was pitching you about a vehicle and pressuring you to make a choice. Some attorneys make the same mistake in business development. They recite their honors, admissions, articles, accomplishments and the reputation of their firm. Potential clients generally are not interested in *your* credentials; you have a law degree, and that’s good enough. Clients want to talk about *their* favorite topic: themselves. Remember, if the *other* person is talking, *you* are selling.

### Your personal business development plan

I recommend that you write a four-page a personal marketing plan based on the four sources of new business. You may have a head full of marketing ideas, but they are inchoate and you won’t do them because they’re just good intentions. But once you

write them down, your plans are concrete. Now you have a checklist to work from, and a document that you can use to measure your progress.

Here's what your plan should include:

**Page one** of should be a list of your top 10 clients. Set a date when you will visit the client at their premises and make plans to get to know as many people there as possible. This is the low hanging fruit: clients already trust you, send you work and mail you checks.

I'm always surprised about how many lawyers have never visited their clients or met them in person. They've emailed them, phoned them and Fed-Ex'd documents to them, but they've never laid eyes upon them. This is a client relationship at risk, because to the client all you are is a mere email address. All it takes is a change of personnel on the client side and your work will be gone. Therefore, even if you have to drive 100 miles or climb into a plane, you must meet your clients.

Rainmakers tell me that when they become less busy, they simply visit their clients and come back with a handful of files. This is because the client was probably fretting about a problem for weeks, until the lawyer showed up and offered to help solve the problem. For example, if you helped a client close on their house, they now have a big asset and will need an estate plan. They may have teenage kids who crash their cars and get DUIs. They may have a dispute they need help with. The client may have lost a job and be unaware they have an EEO claim, and may be considering starting their own business. The client will never think to call you about it, but they'll tell you about it if you visit and ask questions.

If your target person is nearby, meet them for breakfast, coffee, lunch or dinner. The point is to see them face-to-face, because that is how relationships are built. And new business comes through relationships. To get started, I recommend that:

- You pick one day when you will not work through lunch or go out with your colleagues at the firm, and instead take a prospective client out to lunch.
- Pick one morning each week when you'll buy coffee for a referral source.
- Pick one evening when you will take a client out to dinner or to someplace fun, like a ball game or musical event.

By weaving business development into your daily activities, you'll find the time to do it – and still bill all your hours.

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