

Young Lawyer's Perspective on Rainmaking: A Timeline for Success

By Amy Messigian and Bronwyn Roberts



Amy Messigian



Bronwyn Roberts

Having clients of your own has certain benefits that are not always available to lawyers who are serving firm clients. Unlike their “service lawyer” peers, “rainmakers” can be selective about the firms at which they want to work, the people with whom they want to work, the type of work they want to do, and the clients they want to serve. They are also generally compensated for their rainmaking efforts. Accordingly, becoming a “rainmaker” is an important goal for the lawyer seeking to be in charge of her destiny. To this end, we propose a timeline for new lawyers looking to become rainmakers down the road.

Law Students

You do not need to wait until you have finished law school to begin networking or getting involved in legal associations. Join local and national bar associations, and seek out leadership positions for law students. In many cases, you will be able to maintain a leadership role in the committee you join after you have graduated, and you will have already established a budding network with other attorneys. Attend any local bar association meetings you can.

Get a social life. Don't let all your classes keep you from reaching out to community and personal interest groups. The people you meet in social settings could very well become clients or referral sources at some point in the future.

First Year

As soon as you begin your new position, reach out to law school classmates to meet for lunch and compare notes about your respective experiences. Keep updated

business cards handy to exchange.

Law firms frequently buy tables at community and bar association events. Seek to secure a seat at your firm table when possible. And again, bring those business cards!

Second Year

Many of you will be approaching a high school reunion in the first three years of practice. As much as you may not want to remember your high school hairdo or

Pro bono work allows you to perfect your craft.

contact information for your classmates, understand the legal work they are performing, and make sure they know where you are and the type of work you are doing. In a few years, these classmates will likely become excellent referral sources.

Get your name known in the legal community by offering to coauthor an article with a senior lawyer in your firm. Even in cases where you do not receive authorship credit, showing an interest in article development now and contributing to the research or editing of an article will pay off later when that same partner is looking for a coauthor on a different article. Also, use downtime between work to write on your own. You never know when you will have the opportunity to publish down the road, and researching a topic of interest to you will provide additional clarification and understanding of part of your practice.

Avoid collecting continuing education credits alone. Rather than rack up your continuing education credits online or via telephone, attend as many continuing legal education seminars in person as possible. Focus on topics that interest you and expand your knowledge of a particular area of law. Remember to have a supply of

significant other, you should attend your reunion. You will meet and reconnect with numerous people in varying businesses and careers, many of whom may look to you now, or in the future, for legal advice.

Although you will have far less time to do so later in your career, during the early years, you may be capable of taking on pro bono work, often with the blessing of your firm. Even though this may not seem to be the best way to make rain, taking on pro bono work allows you to perfect your craft and often gives you the ability to start and finish a matter with little outside assistance. Being able to survive legal minefields on your own builds the confidence necessary to appear before judges and jurors and will serve you well when you are called upon to take on the challenge in the future.

Ask the senior associates and partners with whom you work to send you to court hearings that they would otherwise cover with a telephonic appearance, such as status conferences and minor discovery hearings. Appearing will lessen your fears of speaking before court in the future when you have something more to say than “Ms. Messigian for the Defendant, Your

Honor.” Again, although this does not directly create rain, it will improve your public speaking—something quite necessary to the litigator who hopes to bring in clientele of her own.

Seek guidance from your mentors. Many law firms have established programs pairing junior lawyers with more experienced attorneys who are tasked with mentoring new lawyers. If you are paired with a great rainmaker as your mentor, good for you! Take advantage of the opportunity by asking for advice on what you can be doing to become a rainmaker and for his or her support by including you in your mentor’s rainmaking activities. Seek out firm rainmakers and ask about how they built their practices, and what they would suggest you do at this stage in your career.

Third Year

Join and become active in local civic associations or trade associations. Attend their meetings and offer your assistance in projects. When you join such associations, make sure that the people you meet know the type of legal work performed by you and your firm.

Fourth Year

Watch and learn from “rainmakers” in your firm by participating in firm marketing events. Assist in the planning and presentation of a seminar updating clients on important trends in your field.

Continue to keep track of your law school classmates and determine whether they could be referral sources in the future. Also, send holiday cards and news articles of interest to prospective clients with whom you have connected along the road and clients of the firm with whom you have enjoyed a working relationship. Let these prospective clients know that you are interested in and concerned about their business needs.

Fifth Year

Add value to your personal stock by beginning to develop a unique expertise in a particular field. In addition, look at your firm’s clientele and determine whether any major clients or prospective clients do business in another state, and seek admission to that state’s bar. Many states allow you to apply for admission without examination after five years of practice in another jurisdiction.

Create your business plan. Set aside time to draft your marketing goals for each quarter or year, such as getting published, attending local bar events, or going out to lunch with a client, and hold yourself accountable for reaching those goals. Even better, get together with colleagues who have similar rainmaking aspirations and agree to hold one another accountable for achieving your interim goals each week or month. Similar to a marketing mentoring circle, having a group to check in with is great for inspiring you to put the time into achieving your goals, helping you overcome obstacles along the way, and sharing creative rainmaking ideas.

Sixth Year

Become very knowledgeable about the depth of services offered by your firm. Be on top of recent firm work and success stories. Get to know your firm colleagues outside your practice area and be ready to make appropriate introductions of your colleagues to your prospective clients.

Take prospective clients out for lunch and listen to the issues they may have. Offer to introduce them to people who could assist them in their businesses.

Seventh Year

Having coauthored articles with more senior lawyers in your earlier years, now is the time to branch out and seek to publish something that you have written on your own. Get an idea for an interesting piece and contact bar journals and trade journals to determine whether there might be a place for your proposed article. Even if you are unable to get your article published, you may be able to use it as a client alert that you could send to clients and prospective clients of the firm.

Speaking engagements are another great way to build your name recognition while meeting people interested in your area of expertise. Make sure that the attorneys you look to for mentoring know that you are interested in an opportunity to speak, and get their suggestions on how you can improve your chances of being asked to participate on panels at various events.

Eighth Year

Having cemented your relationship for several years with local or national organizations, seek a leadership role within a

section of the bar association, your alumni association, or other organizations in which you have been active.

Ninth Year

By now, you likely have had the good fortune of having someone ask for your legal assistance. Even if the matter is a small one that might not meet the profile of your firm’s typical clientele, take it. You will find that good work on a small matter will lead to opportunities for larger matters; it will also likely lead to lucrative referrals.

Tenth Year

In your tenth year, you should be well versed in how to market yourself and how to start building your own client base. You will have presented at bar association events, written articles of interest to your target client base, dined with prospective clients, made important introductions for clients and prospective clients, and likely will already have some business of your own. Now is the time to set aside four to five hours per week and devote them to marketing and increasing your client base. You will likely continue to do almost all that you have done in the preceding years, but you will now know what works best for you. If you have found that article writing is not bringing in the business you had hoped it would, but that your weekly luncheons have, scale down the writing and make your lunch dates more frequent. Similarly, if you find that speaking engagements are particularly uncomfortable, but you still have a message to get out, cut down on your public speaking and focus on your writing. Figure out what works best for you, set aside the time, and get out there and build a practice. The rain may not be flowing yet, but the forecast looks good. ●

Amy Messigian is a first-year associate at Hill, Farrer & Burrill, LLP, in Los Angeles, California. She focuses her practice on labor and employment law and litigation. Bronwyn Roberts is a partner in her tenth year of practice at Duane Morris, LLP, in Boston, Massachusetts. She practices in employment law and commercial litigation. Ms. Messigian and Ms. Roberts are cochairs of the Young Lawyer Outreach Subcommittee of the Woman Advocate Committee. They would like to thank Nan Joesten for her contributions to this article.