Building the Next Generation of Rainmakers

Recently I was asked to give a presentation on building the next generation of rainmakers. As I thought about what I would tell the audience, it occurred to me that most of the rainmakers in law firms are or will be at retirement age within the next 10 years. That may be fine if a firm has institutional clients, but if the firm is more entrepreneurial, then building the next generation of rainmakers is especially important.

Before considering how to build the next generation of rainmakers, it is important to understand what makes rainmakers different.. I believe rainmakers generally have high levels of emotional intelligence and likely have different personality types than most lawyers. My premise seems to be supported by a couple of articles by Lawrence R. Richard, an Altman Weil consultant. Based on his and my own findings on the subject, I believe most rainmakers have a strong ego drive. In part, they define themselves by the recognition they receive and by the sense of accomplishment they feel when hired by a new client. Most rainmakers are empathetic, meaning they have great ability to understand the world from their client's perspective. Rainmakers typically exhibit high ego strength/resilience, meaning they are able to bounce back from criticism/rejection or defeat in a trial. Rainmakers are more likely to be sociable, outgoing and extroverted. They are comfortable with people either individually or in groups. Rainmakers typically set high goals for themselves and have a plan to achieve them. These are all examples of high emotional intelligence. But, I think rainmakers exhibit other characteristics:

- They really care.
- They expect more of themselves than others do.
- They have high energy.
- They inspire confidence.
- They have a passion for their work and their clients.

So what do the characteristics of rainmakers tell us about creating the future rainmakers? I think it tells us several things:

- Rainmaking will be natural for few and a challenge for many.
- We need to focus on raising the level of emotional intelligence.
- One size does not fit all (we need to customize our training to the individual).
- We need to teach associates to set goals and prepare a plan.
- Client development training should be interactive and experiential.
- There must be follow-up individual coaching.
- Programs for 1-3 year associates should be vastly different than programs for more senior associates.

When I do programs on client development for junior lawyers I focus on a variety of things, but the main focus is on people skills and reputation building. I try to make workshops with them interactive. I ask them what they think a 1-3 year lawyer should do about client development. I show them pictures of newly promoted shareholders with names and then show just the pictures and ask them for the names. Then I show them how to remember the names. I ask them what they do and when many say: "I am a litigator…" we go over better answers to that question. I also role play being seated next to them on an airplane and ask how they would strike up a conversation.

I begin every session by making clear that their primary task at this point is to become the best lawyer they can possibly be. I encourage them to be a sponge and to set specific learning goals: "At the end of my first year I will have learned to……" I also let them know that their supervising attorney is their client and that they need to practice their "people skills" on her. What is her personality type? Is she a driver, analytical, amiable or expressive? What difference does that make in working with her? These are the type of people skills topics we discuss. I encourage them and show them how to establish and maintain a contacts list and when they are invited to functions to learn the names of people they meet and "work the room." It is never too early to learn these skills. I speak to them on the importance of "dressing for success." I suggest that they look at their practice group website and offer to improve it. Finally, I show them how to convert a legal memo into a potentially publishable article.

My program for 4-7 year lawyers is more advanced and focuses more on relationship building. Once again the program is interactive. I ask that each give me in advance something they have written that they believe would make a great article. I ask for volunteers and we go over what they have written and I show them how to change it with the mind of building a reputation and getting hired. Next, we focus on presentation skills. I have them imagine they have been asked to speak on a legal topic at an industry conference. I ask each participant to get up and give the first couple of minutes of the presentation and then give an outline of the remainder of it. We then turn to how clients hire lawyers and I divide the group into smaller groups and hand out scenarios for them to discuss and present. Then we have scenarios for starting a new assignment for a new client and scenarios for follow up after an assignment. I ask the small groups to present their ideas on what clients want and what causes them to change lawyers or law firms. I show them the survey information from the American Corporate Counsel Association.

I advise senior associates that it is time for them to get known as an expert in something. I ask what work they are passionate about, perform exceptionally well and that *serves a client need.* (If you are a fan and champion of agricultural law but are located in a major industrial area, you may wish to develop another expertise or relocate.) I encourage senior associates to consider focusing on industries as much as they focus on what they do. We also take a look at their bio on the firm website to see what kind of message it sends to a client or potential client.

These are two basic workshops designed primarily to capture the associates' attention and give them the basics. If these are successful, then more advanced materials and more focus individual items can be added. There are several approaches to make the workshops more effective. First, whoever is doing the training should try to get to know the associate participants in advance. Meeting in person is obviously the best way to get to know them, but a short questionnaire can also be used. Second, find areas to let associates do part of the teaching. For example, senior associates can teach part of the program for junior associates. I encourage partners to attend. They can offer great ideas and valuable insights on what has worked for them. At the end of each session I ask each participant to write down three things they plan to do to implement the ideas we discussed and I encourage them to email the ideas to me. Finally, I believe it is important to have follow-up, one-on-one coaching sessions; otherwise it is just a nice learning experience that is not implemented.

What if all the rainmakers in your firm retired, and it stopped raining? Could your firm survive the drought? Act now to create a new generation of rainmakers.