

Play to Win

Stepping Up to Marketing Success

Volunteering to help a partner or be a fill-in could give you great exposure.

By [Sally J. Schmidt](#)

Recently, I was in a meeting with a very successful and well-respected partner. I thought back to the first time I met him, when he was a young lawyer asked to replace another lawyer as the firm's representative to a networking group. Over the years, he made the most of his network activities and connections, bringing his firm information about other firms and the legal industry more generally. Now, he's a member of his firm's management team.

It's very possible this lawyer would have ended up in the same place after the same amount of time without taking on the representative's role. But I have seen many other examples where lawyers took advantage of that type of opportunity and then ultimately became firm leaders and business generators.

There will be many times in your career when people need replacements, volunteers or fill-ins. If you step up to help, these situations could give you great exposure and contribute to your business development success.

Step Up

What kinds of things might cross your path?

- **Seminars and presentations.** When a practice group decided to plan a client seminar, a young lawyer volunteered to put together an outline, materials and slides for one of the partners. At the last minute, the partner was unable to participate and, because of her knowledge of the subject matter, she was asked to fill in on the panel, the only associate on the program.
- **Articles, blog posts and papers.** Similarly, another young lawyer offered to conduct research and write an outline for a white paper a partner was developing on how laws in municipalities across the state varied on a certain issue. His work product was so comprehensive that the partner insisted on listing him as a co-author. It's not always easy to get bylines as a young lawyer and not every partner will be so generous. But even without the credit, the contributor learns immensely from the research and experience
- **Pitches and proposals.** A client team was responding to an RFP to help a company in additional substantive areas. An associate offered to draft sections for the proposal and expressed interest in being presented as a member of the team. When the lead partner put together the interview team for the pitch, she asked the associate to attend so she could introduce the client to a young lawyer who would be working on the matters.
- **Client events.** A senior litigation associate positioned herself as the go-to person for last-minute invitations when there were empty seats. Despite the fact that she had a young family, she made herself available to attend baseball games, community events and client dinners with

some very important firm contacts. She quickly elevated herself to be one of the most in-demand lawyers in the firm, which led to more proactive opportunities.

- **Books or book chapters.** A partner who had been visible in a niche area through his writing and speaking was approached by a publisher to write a book on the subject. Turns out, two other well-known lawyers in the subject area had already signed contracts to write the book but missed their obligations and deadlines. Even though he was the third person asked, he wrote the book that positioned him as one of the best-known lawyers in the area.

Follow Up

It goes without saying that you must do a good job with the chance you've been given, whether an article, meeting, pitch or presentation. Just as important is maximizing the activity so you get proper recognition and potential future opportunities.

Depending on the situation, you might:

- Give presentations to others in the firm.
- Provide summary reports to management.
- Send information to people outside the firm who might benefit.
- Leverage it into additional activities. For example, turn an article into a presentation, turn a presentation into a book chapter and so on.
- Thank whoever gave you the opportunity — partner, client, publisher or organization.

Raise Your Hand

The goal is to step up when people need help, by either volunteering for or reacting to opportunities. Remember, you don't need to be the first person asked; you need to be the last.