

Play to Win

Make Rain by Forming Good Habits

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With good systems and protocols, almost anyone can make rain. Here's a checklist of successful rainmaking habits.

Recently, I read an [interesting article on research](#) that analyzed the attributes of 1,600 rainmakers from professional service firms. The study's authors concluded that rainmakers fall into five categories and that the most effective type of business developer is the "Activator."

Activators accounted for just 16% of the rainmaker population but 32% of the top performers — and had both the highest percentage of high performers and the lowest percentage of low performers.

So What Do These 'Activators' Do?

According to the research, Activators do things like:

- Build networks that are deep and wide and engage with people at all levels of a client organization.
- Get to know colleagues throughout the firm and connect them to clients.
- Proactively seek new ways to work with clients.
- Have significant numbers of LinkedIn connections and regularly post and comment.
- Set specific goals when attending events.
- Follow the news and share developments with clients.
- Check in regularly with inactive clients.

One of the most important traits of Activators is that they are consistent with their business development efforts. Despite their busy schedules, they are disciplined and find the time to make things happen.

The presenters of the study, called The Rainmaker Genome Project, emphasized that the business development attributes they tracked were habits and behaviors, not personality traits. Their conclusion: "Given that these are habits, this suggests the powerful notion that rainmakers can be made, not born."

Creating Business Development Habits

Even if you don't consider yourself a natural rainmaker, there are many things you can do to turn valuable business development behaviors into habits. Consider the following.

Finding the Time

If you find yourself wondering how to find time for business development, make time. Schedule 15 minutes a day or an hour a week to work on your activities. Make a calendar appointment so you develop some momentum. This time can be used to connect with people on LinkedIn, set up lunches, send out notes, check in with dormant clients and so forth. Similarly, schedule a two-hour block the day after you return from a conference to follow up with people you met.

Scheduling Contacts

Some of your relationships may lend themselves to a regular schedule of contact that will keep you top of mind. For example, set up a standing quarterly lunch with an accountant referral source or calendar a monthly check-in call with a closely held business owner to see what's going on in the business. Likewise, calendar follow-up activities immediately after you make contact with someone so too much time doesn't pass.

Uncovering Opportunities

There are many ways you can be prompted with news or information that will give you a reason to reach out to people. Create Google alerts (or something similar) on your key contacts, their companies or their industries. Set up litigation notices on your top targets. Follow people and industry leaders on social media. Whether you are congratulating someone on a promotion or sending an update on a salient topic, this remains one of the most valuable ways to stay top of mind. (And be helpful!)

Setting Objectives

No matter what the activity, you will be more effective if you establish an objective — as in, what you hope to accomplish. Going to a firm retreat? Identify colleagues you haven't met from other practices or offices with whom to interact. Going to a professional meeting? Set a number of new contacts you'd like to meet. More generally, most lawyers benefit from giving themselves some targets to hit, such as having four in-person meetings a month, making three client visits a year or investing 200 marketing hours a year.

Organizing Contacts

Whether you use Excel, Outlook or a notepad, find a way to organize your relationships. Once you create a contact list, track the last contact you had and calendar when to get back in touch. Or put notes in Outlook to capture your conversations and related information. Don't rely on your memory.

Habits That Make It Easy

Establish some habits that will make it more likely for you to be opportunistic. Carry notecards in your briefcase so you can write follow-up notes on the plane. Keep LinkedIn open on your computer every day so you can immediately follow up with people you've met. Forward contacts immediately to your marketing department with notes to add them to firm lists for relevant activities (e.g., webinars and alerts).

We often think the quintessential rainmaker is a lawyer who loves going to social events and meeting new people. However, with good systems and protocols, almost anyone can make rain.

Sally Schmidt, President of Schmidt Marketing, Inc., helps lawyers and law firms grow their practices. She was a founder and the first President of the Legal Marketing Association, is a Fellow of the College of Law Practice Management and was one of the first inductees to LMA's Hall of Fame. Known for her practical advice, she is the author of two books, "[Marketing the Law Firm: Business Development Techniques](#)" and "[Business Development for Lawyers: Strategies for Getting and Keeping Clients](#)." Follow her @SallySchmidt.