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LEGAL MARKETING

Associates in Law Firms — Rise and Market

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Special to the Legal

Shiver me timbers — it sure is a difficult time to be an associate or new lawyer in any law firm. In the last few months, associates have been laid off, paid not to show up and those who are still employed have in many cases seen their salaries chopped.

Here is a road map for your survival — no, your success, at your law firm. In addition to being a terrific lawyer, you need to truly focus on developing business and a wide network of contacts. Just about everything will require you to physically get out of your office and engage people one-on-one.

Make sure you look the part of a great lawyer. Yes, I mean dress professionally. Forget about casual dressing. Look like someone who is really smart and worth every penny. Whether you like it or not, you are constantly being “sized-up” by people you meet.

Practice out loud how you will introduce yourself. The trick is to explain what you do in a way that makes someone want to ask, “How do you do that?” For example, instead of saying, “I am a real estate lawyer,” say,



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“I help the owners of commercial real estate properties put together lucrative deals and make sure they are protected from liability.”

Make a list of your law school classmates. (Contact your law school if you need to.) Identify who is in non-competing firms, mega-firms (who may have conflicts or rates too high to take certain cases) and small solo shops (who might need someone to team up with on a case). Then set up two lunches a week — eight a month — starting with classmates who don’t compete with your firm or you and then moving on to the ones from small and giant firms. Ask them to describe a great client or case they would like. What are the challenges and opportunities they see ahead. Listen, then follow up and try to help them get

work, or overcome some hurdle they face (want an introduction to someone you know, need a new secretary, etc.) Be a great friend to these folks through the ages, and it will pay off. Consider doing the same thing with opposing counsel once a case has concluded.

Calendar a weekly lunch or breakfast with other sources of referrals — accountants, agents, bankers on a monthly basis. Look for ways, again, of helping them in some way. The favor will be returned.

Calendar a business development lunch for at least once a week with someone you networked with — either at a social or business function. Ask about their business. How do they make money? What does a great client or piece of work look like to them? What obstacles exist to their success? If they could do one thing, what would it be to increase their productivity? Listen to the answers and plan appropriate follow-up. Whomever you meet with, calendar to follow-up with them in some way once a month.

As Maya Angelou stated, and I do believe, “People will forget what you say, they will forget what you do, but they never will forget how you make them feel.” So be thinking about how

you treat all your contacts — are you thoughtful of what is happening in their lives (e.g., sick relative, accomplishments of their children, etc.)? Do you go the extra distance for them on levels including but not limited to work? So ask. Send personal notes and more. Be there for people who matter to you.

Create a snail-mail and e-mail list of all your contacts. Contacts include clients, friends, referral sources, anyone you buy a service from, relatives, former law school and undergraduate classmates, prospects and more.

Scour the newspapers, industry periodicals and more for helpful news items you can send to your mailing list. You need to have your name in front of someone at least seven times a year for them to remember you. Stay on their radar. Set up Google alerts on their name and their company.

Join an organization you are passionate about (where clients and prospects hang out) and volunteer, write for, sponsor, speak to and lead something in the organization. Aim for eventually getting on the board. Tip: Ask your clients — or those you want as clients — where they get their professional education from and consider joining those associations.

Promote yourself. Send your law school alumni magazine (and other periodicals read by clients, referral sources and prospects that take “people” news) a regular flow of news on yourself — speeches, writings, honors, board memberships, etc.

Scout out publications that honor “rising” younger lawyers — and go for it. Check the editorial calendars of different publications, and then go to work nominating yourself with help from your firm if you need it.

If you have any clients of your own, visit them on your nickel and take a tour, ask how your service to them can be improved, do an onsite briefing for their staff and shower them with accessibility, communication and responsiveness. Current clients are the No. 1 source of new business for most lawyers.

You need to have your name in front of someone at least seven times a year for them to remember you.

Work on creating a real professional resume of your practice for your Web site biography and more. Speak on subjects you are expert in. (Not an expert? Pick a “hot topic” and become one.) Teach other lawyers and those affected by it in the industry. Write for legal and trade industry publications. Actually list the titles of your speeches/publications on your biography. (Don’t say, “writes and lectures frequently.”)

When out and about, never forget to market your firm to clients, referral sources and friends. Keep on top of

what your firm is doing, successes it has had, new laterals who have joined and more. And then cross-sell.

Follow people when they leave their current place of employment — you never know where they will land. Keep in touch.

If you are meeting one-on-one with someone, do your homework before the encounter. Research them, their business, their possible legal needs and their mentions in the news and more. Don’t “wing” these meetings.

Write down at least nine marketing activities you will do each month and tape it to your chair. Ideally, you will schedule meetings or get-togethers with three referral sources, three current clients and three prospective clients and engage in some activity.

Networking and marketing are truly “jobs” and you will get out of these activities exactly what you put into them. So get out the elbow grease, the research databases, your best handshake and listening skills and get up, get out and get going. A prosperous and busy future awaits you. •