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Young Lawyers (Gen Z) Are Getting Tons of New Business—the Old-Fashioned Way

I hunted down some lawyers from both coasts who had been referred to me by their firms as folks who had built impressive books of business.



By Stacy West Clark | May 17, 2024 at 12:00 PM

I went on a mission recently. I wanted to find out if, and then how, lawyers in their late 20s and 30s were building books of business.

Were they doing something older millennials, Gen Xers and baby boomer lawyers were not?

Were there new tricks of the trade older lawyers could benefit from, too?

Surely, they were doing things with their phones or the internet that were working more effectively than the tried-and-true “old school” ways focusing on developing relationships with clients and referral sources.

Let me introduce you to a few and what they told me:

- **Sean Jefferson, entertainment law, Frankfurt Kurnit Klein & Selz (New York)**

I had an eye-opening conversation with learning about his robust entertainment law practice based out of New York City. Jefferson has wide-ranging experience in all areas of entertainment and media, representing financiers, production companies, producers, documentary filmmakers, directors, athletes, writers and independent distributors. Per his bio: “He has negotiated complex single picture and slate multiparty financings both on behalf of producers and financiers. He has also represented producers in recent cutting-edge political documentaries. Jefferson is experienced in structuring and negotiating rights acquisition, content distribution, sales agreements both domestic and foreign, and co-production and financing agreements.”

So, his bio certainly impressed me that he was a highly talented expert in the entertainment industry. What was his business development strategy that had worked for him? Did he have a secret beyond traditional marketing methods that have served rainmakers well for decades? Well, he did. He TEXTS his clients regularly. Yup, the “newest” technique he employs is to be available to his clients in seconds and to have a close relationship with them.

Other things he has done to become highly successful:

- Jefferson attends industry events and has focused on becoming part of this business community.
- He worked hard to become an expert in his area. He achieved that and now spends 12 hours of nonbillable time each week on business development.
- He reads the trade press that his clients read including: The Hollywood Reporter, Indie Wire, Variety and more. So, he knows what is happening in their industry.
- Jefferson constantly looks ahead to issues that could/will affect his clients—advising them early on the ramifications of the writers’ strike to their intellectual property, staffing, production issues and more. He had his clients’ backs weeks before anything happened.
- The word “NO” is not in his vocabulary. He finds a way to get his clients creative goals done.

As he said, “there are no shortcuts—you must build a client’s trust and I work on that every day.”

I loved talking to these very bright and motivated lawyers.

I was unable to find new marketing tactics used by these younger lawyers. They are doing the things I preach—going deep in an industry, understanding the challenges of businesses in it, being where clients are, reading what clients read and anticipating potential problems they have and focusing on forming deep relationships with them.

They are already legal stars whose moxie and energy I so admire. Now it’s your turn. You can do it—try the old-fashioned way before looking around for “quick” solutions!

- **Emma Smizer, video game, new media and technology lawyer, Frankfurt Kurnit Klein & Selz (Los Angeles)**

Smizer is 28 years old, and since joining her firm, she has been focused on serving as outside counsel for companies in the video game production and distribution space. This is a niche she’s passionate about and focused on building upon—a terrific business development strategy.

Based in the firm’s LA office, Smizer attends a number of major industry events, including the Game Developer’s Conference, the Design Innovate Communicate Entertain (D.I.C.E.) Summit, and PAX East/West. She mentioned to me that the legal video game community is quite small, but steadily growing. Smizer has made it a definite practice to “fish where the fish are.”

The firm has encouraged her to go to industry events and connect with members of the video game industry at all levels. There, she has deliberately built a network of referral sources in the industry who are both personal friends and helpful to her practice.

When there is a major development for her clients, such as when Apple updated its developer guidelines, yes, she writes client alerts and blogs about it right away. She tries to be the first voice her clients hear about the news and what they should do as a result of it.

- **Bailey Barnes, mergers and acquisitions, GableGotwals (Oklahoma)**

Barnes, a recent graduate of the University of Oklahoma College of Law, is already focused on excellent client development practices—all of which are tried-and-true “old school” tactics.

As she explained to me:

“As to my ‘specific formula to success,’ I believe my legal career so far can be summed up by two key phrases that go hand-in-hand: ‘lean-in’ and ‘learn.’ Each day, I get the opportunity to work with attorneys much more experienced than I am. By leaning in, I ask questions and glean wisdom from their years of experience. This ‘leaning in’ evolves into learning when I actively apply their wisdom to my own practice

“As it relates to client-development, I’ve received two key pieces of advice from more experienced attorneys. The first is ‘do good work and the clients will follow.’ By leaning in and learning from my superiors, I hope to produce good work that aligns with my clients’ goals. The second is, put simply, that good attorneys don’t develop a book of business by sitting on the couch after clocking out. While I certainly have my fair share of ‘sitting on the couch’ evenings, I aim to lean-in to my local community through pursuing community hobbies such as running and cycling as well as general civic engagement.”

- **Jonathan Goodelman, real estate, Cole Schotz, Hackensack New Jersey, 35 years old**

Goodelman became a partner in his firm this year. His book of business is over seven figures. He did not create this volume of work in a vacuum. Ever since he was a junior associate, he has been laser-focused on having and growing client relationships. As he explained:

“Business development is a daily endeavor for me and never ends. There is no new way to cultivate relationships and create bonds with your clients. It is all very personal and takes constant attention. I have worked to ‘be in the trenches’ with my clients to create an extremely strong bond with them. I have done things the ‘old-school way.’ I go to the industry events and otherwise, where my clients and target clients go. Because I go, over time, builders, bankers, folks from the condo and commercial real estate industries now know me when I walk into a room. When I go to these conferences, I target, specifically, who I want to meet. I have a list! If I need introductions to meet a new connection, I ask for them.

I find ways of delivering value to my connections—this is key. I bring people together to do deals. I ask, “what kind of deals are you looking to do” and then I try to make it happen—so they succeed by using me. I always look for ways to save my clients millions in broker fees or other aspects of a deal.”

Goodelman focuses on getting more work from current clients by looking for ways to help them achieve their objectives. His specific targets include younger people his age because many do not have counsel.

He constantly reminds his clients that he is part of a larger firm so that there is less risk to hire him—a 35-year-old junior partner—to do their work. He makes it a point to know which of his colleagues in his firm have been successful before certain administrative and judicial bodies— so he can cross-sell *their* skills to his clients.

The cherry on the cake: Goodelman is extremely personable and likeable. His enthusiasm to help his clients and contacts is PALPABLE. There is energy in his voice.

Now it is your turn! I am rooting for you.

Stacy West Clark *has been helping Pennsylvania, New York, Delaware and New Jersey lawyers and law firms succeed in growing their practices for more than 25 years. She is a former attorney with Morgan, Lewis & Bockius and was the firm’s first director of client relations. For free articles on numerous business development and marketing topics, as well as more information about Clark and her work, please visit www.stacyclarkmarketing.com.*

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