

building a rainmaking culture



Legal administrators can help guide law firm leaders by discussing their organizations' values, visions, procedures, and more to strengthen their rainmaking endeavors.

BY LAWRENCE KOHN

Warning, begging, and prodding lawyers to bring in business are strategies that rarely succeed. That's because the fear of failure and embarrassment are remarkably discouraging forces.

In order to promote rainmaking behavior, legal administrators need to work with law firm leaders to build a rainmaking culture that provides a consistently supportive environment for lawyers to learn about and experiment in rainmaking. And when they do, they will be pleased to see how the culture promotes conformity to the desired behavior. With a strong rainmaking culture, even the recalcitrant naysayers are likely to change their old habits and participate in the effort to bring in new, profitable clients.

A firm's culture is a collection of its values, vision, procedures, and proof. A strong culture exists when all of the components are in harmony. But, when one or more of the components are in discord, the dissonance discourages change.



Creating a rainmaking culture is no easy task. It requires clear thinking and consistent implementation, and law firm administrators are critical participants.

Following are only a few examples in each category. It is management's responsibility to identify the components that will create the marketing culture. Legal administrators can help guide law firm leaders by discussing the current values, vision, procedures, and proof, and considering alternatives that will strengthen the rainmaking culture.

VALUES

Values are guiding principles based upon the strong beliefs of top management. They set the stage for the planning and implementation of every activity within the firm. Here are only a few possible rainmaking values:

- **Success requires both keeping good clients and finding better ones.** Not all law firm leaders believe this to be true. Many still cling to the belief that good work alone will promote growth. This belief seriously undermines a rainmaking culture. While keeping clients is imperative, a rainmaking culture demands a more pro-active posture. The harsh reality is that even after receiving quality work, clients leave. They merge, sell, fail, or become attracted to a competitor.
- **Rainmaking is not optional.** Too many lawyers see rainmaking as discretionary. When times are good, they are too busy to invest in it. When times are bad, maintaining high salaries usually takes priority. So the rainmaking budget suffers. The risk with this approach is that law firms can be thinly capitalized and have minimal staying power when times are tough. Maintaining a rainmaking effort at all times reduces the risk of failure during difficult economic times.
- **Rainmaking is a team effort.** Most law firms still act as a collection of solos, marketing independently and eating what they kill. When teams bring in business, clients see the bench strength of the firm. Plus, an organized team

effort is a bonding experience. It is a hunting party that works together to benefit the common good.

- **Everyone in the firm must contribute to the rainmaking process.** Most law firms have the misconception that only a few lawyers are the finders and the rest are minders and grinders. This philosophy excludes lawyers who could be valuable contributors to the rainmaking effort. While some lawyers may be better than others in interacting with prospects and referral sources, all lawyers can participate in the back office of rainmaking. Coordinating seminars, analyzing target markets, and producing e-mail broadcasts are only a few of the many activities in which all lawyers in the firm must engage.
- **Every interpersonal interaction must build trust.** Too often, lawyers fail to recognize that each client interaction either builds confidence or erodes it. Each lawyer must be aware about every interaction a client has – from the receptionist to the billing department to the collection effort. Pride in every interaction motivates lawyers to reach out. It also maximizes referrals from existing relationships.
- **Innovation is critical to success.** Too often, lawyers do things the same ways they did them in the past. In the meantime, other lawyers are building better mousetraps to catch and serve clients. Innovation is everyone's responsibility. Every time a lawyer solves a client's problem, the solution should be considered as a possible offer to other clients. The practice of law, as in any other business, must be a state-of-the-art process.

These are only a few sample rainmaking values. Top management should discuss the strong beliefs they hold, and those should guide the behaviors of everyone in the firm. With a collection of values, top management can move to the next step of creating a vision.

VISION

A vision is a collection of goals that paint a picture of the firm's future. These goals are a product of the values described above. Most firms have goals that measure billable hours, revenue, or earnings per partner. Here are some sample additional rainmaking goals – both for the firm and for the individual lawyers:

Goals for the firm:

- **The firm will maximize its presence with every client.** Maximizing the relationship with each client is important for two reasons: The first is to maximize revenue. The second is to reduce the risk of a competitor getting a foot in the door. Therefore, the firm should make sure that the lawyers are well aware of all of a client's needs, and that the client is well aware of the firm's services.
- **The firm will increase market share.** Growth should not be limited to expanding current clients. Heavy concentrations in current clients or industries could create catastrophic problems. Similar to investing for retirement, having a diversified client portfolio is important.
- **The firm will offer the greatest value compared to all competitors.** Understanding value is a key to rainmaking because that is what all clients seek. Value is the ratio between benefits and cost. The goal is to identify the most benefits. The greatest value may not be the least expensive; it could actually be the most expensive. The issue is the ratio. Lawyers should understand the value that the firm offers and constantly improve it. As that happens, the lawyers will be more effective and excited about communicating it.

Goals for individuals in the firm:

- **Lawyers will be more enthusiastic about rainmaking.** Enthusiasm happens when lawyers develop reasonable goals and achievable steps. It is nourished by success and appreciation. Enthusiasm should be expected, and negativism should be promptly suppressed. This is not to say that all lawyers should have a Pollyanna attitude, nor does it mean that all lawyers need to agree on rainmaking strategies. It does mean that naysayers should be asked to support what they can and not discourage the others.

- Lawyers will work in rainmaking teams. Lawyers will strive to identify colleagues in the firm who share common targets and then discuss possible opportunities and plan a coordinated outreach.
- **Lawyers will be organized in their rainmaking.** Lawyers will learn how to be thorough and consistent in their rainmaking. They will strive to be systematic in their efforts to identify quality targets, maintain accurate contact databases, identify outreach strategies, and communicate with targets regularly.
- **Lawyers will strive to innovate.** Lawyers will seek better ways to practice their craft as well as better ways to promote it. They will want to share their observations of best practices with their colleagues to maximize innovation in every aspect of the firm's operations.

PROCEDURES

Procedures are the official ways things are done. Here are some examples of good rainmaking procedures:

- **All targets and activities are pre-approved.** Too often, rainmaking funds are not invested wisely. That's because the standards for what makes for a quality target or activity are not clear. Law firms should help each lawyer become aware about why targets and activities qualify as good opportunities. The practice group leader or marketing partner should review all targets and activities to ensure that they qualify.
- **All clients are reviewed for cross-selling opportunities.** Practice group teams should analyze each client for needs that can be met by other practice groups in the firm.
- **All attorneys are educated about the firm's capabilities.** Every lawyer should study the firm's Web site and become familiar with all firm services. Also, each practice group should educate lawyers in other practice groups about their services and clients.
- **All associates are encouraged to participate.** It is unreasonable to expect young lawyers to become rainmakers without exposure to the techniques. Procedures should be in place to ensure that all young lawyers learn from existing rainmakers by attending pitches, rainmaking events, and meetings with prospective clients and referral sources.

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- All job descriptions include supporting rainmaking. Every person in any position in a firm can support rainmaking. Receptionists, secretaries, and administrators often bring great value to rainmaking and should be made aware that it is a part of their jobs and their compensation package will be affected by their participation or lack thereof.

PROOF

Proof is management acting in accordance with the values, vision and procedures. Proof is ultimately the most important aspect of creating a rainmaking culture – and it is where many firms fail. Management may talk a good game, but never follow through.

Here are some examples of rainmaking proof:

- **Management participates.** Too often, managers talk about the importance of rainmaking, but fail to personally participate. Management must demonstrate its support by doing – acting as examples and setting the standards. Managers should also invite associates to attend rainmaking lunches and pitches.
- **Management makes rainmaking accessible.** The firm should implement a variety of activities to which all lawyers can invite their contacts. A holiday party and a few seminars per year will give the attorneys easy and appropriate reasons to reach out to their contacts. The firm should send e-mail updates, implement webcasts, and maintain a blog.

- **Management demonstrates appreciation.** Of course, successful rainmaking should lead to increased compensation. But, appreciation doesn't necessarily mean financial. A personal congratulation is a meaningful reward. Management should be sure to acknowledge all rainmaking efforts and *not* just bringing in new clients. Active involvement in well-targeted organizations, speeches, and articles should be acknowledged both in person and at group meetings.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Creating a rainmaking culture is no easy task. It requires clear thinking and consistent implementation, and law firm administrators are critical participants.

Without the proper culture, it is easy for lawyers to stay stuck in old behaviors. However, if the values are sound, the vision is clear, the procedures are reasonable, and management acts responsibly, lawyers will feel more comfortable participating in rainmaking. And, when they participate, there's a good chance they will succeed. ✱

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