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## SUCCEEDING AS A YOUNG LITIGATOR

### An Old Sales Maxim Will Help Your Business Development

By Joseph Siprut

In the race to develop business, many lawyers often believe that he who has the best credentials will invariably win. Maybe this should be the case, maybe it should not—but that is a topic for another day. For now, suffice it to say that in the real world, the lawyer who has the best credentials—the one who, on paper, seems best suited to undertake the representation of a particular client or a particular matter—will not always get the job. Understanding why this is so is fundamental to developing business.

When I first graduated law school, I practiced in a well-credentialed litigation boutique with an excellent reputation in the Chicago area. This will be simple, I thought at the time. Even though I am a raw rookie, my firm is one of the best in town when it comes to X; therefore, all I have to do is praise the firm's virtues when I come into contact with potential clients, and—presto! I'll be a rainmaker in no time.

Unfortunately, it wasn't quite that easy. Here's the old sales maxim that explains why: *People buy things (including services) from people they like*. This long-established sales maxim applies to lawyers (sellers of legal services) as well, and its lessons are powerful. All things being equal, people prefer to do business with people they like, or have relationships with, whenever possible and practicable.

To this day, for example, I patronize a local mom and pop video rental store whose part-owner is a friend of mine. I could just as easily walk down the block in the other direction to my local Blockbuster, where the selection is ten times more voluminous and the price and service probably comparable, if not better. If I was approached by a Blockbuster employee and forced to justify my decision on paper, I could not do so—except in one respect. I have a relationship with the other store—Period.

The same is true when it comes to selling legal services. Successful rain-makers may have excellent legal skills, but they also have strong *relationships* with their clients (and future or potential clients). Nor is this relationship-driven selection process irrational in the legal context. Clients and their lawyers speak with one another regularly; it makes sense that a client would prefer not to deal with someone he cannot stand personally.

But forming the kind of relationships that lead to business generation does not happen overnight; it takes time, and happens over the course of years. The efforts you undertake today—serving on a committee or charitable board, taking someone out to lunch, etc.—may not (and almost certainly will not) pay off tomorrow. But such continued efforts will pay off in the future, as most successful rainmakers would attest.

*Joseph Siprut is an associate with the Chicago office of Howrey LLP. He can be contacted at [siprutj@howrey.com](mailto:siprutj@howrey.com).*