

Rainmaking in a Busy World

By Anne Marie Seibel



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Deadlines are pending, homework is waiting, clients are calling, and the little league game is starting. Not to mention that you were trying to find a date night with your husband that didn't involve hobnobbing with each other's work colleagues. With all of these competing pressures, how do you fit in the client relations time that is required to be a rainmaker?

Thankfully, you don't need to feel limited by the traditional golf outings, nights on the town, and sporting events. And, as the face of in-house counsel changes to reflect more women, those traditional means aren't as likely to make a good impression as they once were. Plus, women working in business have their own time pressures as they juggle responsibilities at work and home. With so many lawyers seeking legal work, the invitations can become overwhelming to busy in-house counsel with the added burdens brought on by a challenging economy. Busy in-house counsel prefer less time away from home—or at least less time that feels like forced socialization and work.

While client dinners and receptions are still part of firm rainmaking efforts, you shouldn't feel limited to those types of activities, nor should any attorney believe that her responsibilities at home must keep her from building meaningful client relationships. The kinds of opportunities for such relationships may change over time, but don't hesitate to think outside the box. These creative opportunities may

give you an advantage over others blindly following the traditional model.

Rainmakers are successful because they create relationships with decision makers. Being a parent can help you to connect with other professionals and develop solid personal relationships. If your children are young, look around at your daily activities and think about ways to broaden your network. On the way in and out of daycare, you are likely passing by many other young professionals in your community. Do you know where they work or what their interests are? Don't be afraid to reach out and get to know these other parents. The fact that you are juggling daycare and your career already gives you common ground from which to start a conversation. And parents appreciate when other parents acknowledge how difficult it can be to do it all. These personal relationships can lead to professional relationships.

While you are juggling young children, organize events that bring mothers with young children together—a morning at the zoo or an afternoon at the local children's theater. It may not be easy to chat with the kids running in circles around you, but you'll still be sharing experiences that will help you get to know one another better. Additionally, these experiences allow you to practice the type of networking at which many women excel—connecting people with similar interests or needs. For example, if you know of one in-house lawyer who is feeling isolated and is looking for opportunities to meet like-minded peers, connect her with another client and invite them both to an event. While making these connections for others may not lead to business immediately, the people you have helped may come around to help you in the future.

Once the soccer matches, baseball games, or ballet recitals start, look around for other parents busy on their BlackBerries while on the sidelines. Strike up a conversation, get their email addresses, and find out

about their businesses. Continue to look for ways to connect over the years. You'll still be working when the kids are off at college and you find yourself with afternoons free that were once spent on the sports fields. Your contacts who are in the same shoes may be interested in catching up—and perhaps they've moved up in their organizations and have some work to distribute.

As you consider ways to fit networking into your week, don't be afraid to enjoy your networking time. Think about how you'd like to spend your time and add a networking component. Do you enjoy relaxing at your beach or lake house? Invite clients to relax with you. Try to find events that you want to do in your hours out of the office and invite others to come with you. Have you been wanting to browse in the new art gallery in town? Invite a potential client to join you. Is there a concert coming to town? Look for someone with similar musical taste. Can't get your husband to go to the ballet? Buy a ticket for someone you've been wanting to know better in a client's office. Is there a local charity that means a lot to you? Get involved with the board and connect with others who share your passion.

The key is not to let all of the activities pulling on your time prevent you from any efforts to build your networks. Rather, dedicate yourself to efforts that are meaningful to you and your practice and that you can enjoy at the same time.

If all else fails, don't forget the benefits of resources like the Woman Advocate Committee. Check off your CLE requirements and get together with women from across the country to build a network. We promise that we know the value of a relaxing afternoon with friends at the spa.

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