

How to Make Rain: Tips from Seasoned Business Development Coaches

By Kimberly Y. Jones, Esq.

In June, the WBA, in conjunction with Suffolk University Law School, sponsored a panel of seasoned business development coaches to discuss HOW TO MAKE RAIN and to share their observations, experiences, and some successful strategies with WBA members and guests. The speakers shared a common denominator in that each coach is also an attorney. The duality of their perspectives allowed each panelist to provide unique insights, having inhabited both the world of attorneys as well as serving as coaches who advise attorneys regarding business development techniques and strategies. To help you further refine, or enhance, your business development strategies to achieve greater success, I offer the following highlights from our WBA/SULS program featuring the collective wisdom of our panel of coaches: Elizabeth (“Betsy”) Munnell, Stewart M. Hirsch, Catherine Alman MacDonagh.

Build Relationships Based on Authenticity. An important skill to possess is the ability to get along and interact well with others. Demonstrate that you care about what is important to your clients and colleagues. Be yourself; it is who you know best. Do not try to imitate anyone else’s style or mannerisms because it will be perceived as less than genuine. Strong, enduring relationships are built on the *quality*, not the *quantity*, of your network. Also, spend time in the physical presence of your clients. Much of our communications are accomplished electronically and, as a consequence, we personally interface with clients less frequently. Visit client offices or facilities to develop a deeper understanding of their environment, culture, and personnel. Personal interactions are opportunities to fortify relationships.

Truly Listen to Your Clients. Listen earnestly to your clients. Engage in conversations that focus on their needs and objectives, not the firm’s pitch or horse and pony show. Client encounters should be spent listening 80% of the time, with the remaining 20% of the interaction dedicated to asking thoughtful, open-ended questions that provide greater insight and understanding of the issues that are of the greatest concern to the client. Do more than talk. Offer meaningful, substantive guidance and input that resonates with each client based on their particular needs. If you dominate the conversation, opportunities for the client to communicate their concerns, challenges, and objectives are lost.

Become a Valuable Resource of Invaluable Information. Deliver unexpected and exceptional value, information, data, and access to resources. Go from cookie cutter to customization based on the specific needs and organizational nuances of each client. The result will be your evolution from simply a legal services vendor to becoming a valued member of the client team who thoroughly knows the organization, understands the specific issues, and can fulfill a need. Stop selling and start helping.

Approach Your Work from the Client Perspective. Whether an existing or prospective client, it is critical to engage in a more comprehensive inquiry than “what keeps you up at night?” Rather, a more focused, meaningful approach involves knowing “what are the *particular* quirks of that *particular* client.” While there are often shared factual backgrounds, each client thinks their issues, problems, and challenges are specific to them – and they are correct. View the issues through the lens of the client and respond by considering factors such as the organizational history, culture, leadership, market niche, or changes impacting their industry.

Be Selective in the Use of Social Media. Be discerning, specific, and personal in your utilization of social media for client interactions. While technology has made communications with clients as well as each other more efficient and expeditious, many of us are inundated with a daily deluge of emails, newsletters, social media contacts, and other electronic communications. Learn to utilize social media effectively without becoming another pesky voice in the “online chorus.” Consider *asking* your clients their preferred method of communication and how frequently they like to receive relevant updates.

Inhabit the Venues Where Your Clients Spend Their Time. Simply stated, go where your existing and prospective clients go. Attend conferences, seminars, and events where you may have an opportunity to meet and interact with clients or prospects in an informal environment. Know where the decision makers, and those who influence the decision makers, spend their time and establish professional residency in those same venues. Circulating in strategically selected venues allows you to develop a more comprehensive understanding of your clients, their industries, and competitors, and to be at the forefront of other issues that may directly or indirectly impact the client.

As the Famed Slogan States, Just Do It. Take Action! Don’t Delay! Advice from a mentor or a business development coach is useless unless you “Just Do It.” There is an abundance of great ideas in the universe, but many have not been acted upon. Implement suggestions made by a business development coach and other successful people you admire. Develop a Strategy, Implement a plan, which will serve as a catalyst for Action in order to produce Results. It starts with the first step. Just Do It.

Leverage Your Life Connections. This issue makes many people uncomfortable, and understandably so. The challenge is how to master “The Ask” without compromising the friendship. If you are not comfortable approaching a friend or professional acquaintance at the symphony or at your child’s little league game, consider asking if you can make an appointment to meet at their

office to talk business. Designating an appropriate time and venue in which to discuss business matters away from the baseball diamond respects the friendship. Your friend will, in turn, appreciate your consideration of their valuable personal or family time.

Strive for Balance. Personal interests, family, hobbies, exercise, charitable service, and other experiences enrich your life and rejuvenate the spirit and, therefore, should not be forfeited. Rather, they can compliment your professional life. You can never regain lost time, so make the most of each moment by working smarter and more efficiently. Block off periods of uninterrupted time to address large projects. Become comfortable with delegation. Ask for assistance, when appropriate. Collaborate with a colleague or utilize an associate or paralegal to contribute to the work product, presentation preparation, or research. Most importantly, make time for you and that which is most important to you.

Express Thanks and Gratitude. The power of “Thank You” is profound. Thank clients for the opportunity to be of service to them. Among those also deserving of gratitude are your referral sources, mentors, advisors, colleagues, and all those who believe in you.

We hope the compilation of tips from the business development coaches is beneficial and enlightening. When contemplating how to grow your book of business consider incorporating some of the recommendations into your business development prospectus. May you develop meaningful, substantive relationships that yield a bountiful professional harvest when it RAINS. So grab your umbrella! Success is waiting for you!

Kimberly Y. Jones is the Founding Attorney and CEO of Athena Legal Strategies Group.

Coach Biographies

Betsy Munnell

Betsy received her B.A. from Harvard College and her J.D. from Harvard Law School, where she serves as a J.D. Adviser in Harvard Law School's Office for Career Services. A noted deal lawyer, she was a partner for 25 years at Edwards Angell Palmer & Dodge (now Edwards Wildman Palmer), in its Boston office, and was among the core group of young partners responsible for the growth of the firm's nationally recognized media and communications finance and M&A practice. In both law firm and bar association activities, Betsy was an outspoken advocate for intensive associate training in business and financial skills and business generation. In 2009, Betsy opened her consulting and career advising practice, *Elizabeth Munnell & Associates*, to help law students, young lawyers and their law schools and employers navigate the uncertain waters of a profession and an economy in flux. Betsy is currently piloting a coaching program for Harvard's Women's Law Association, for students beginning their careers in law firms, and consults to Fullbridge Inc. on its immersive business education programs for law firm associates. A native of New York City, she lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with her husband and three daughters.

Catherine Alman MacDonagh

Catherine is a former corporate counsel, process improvement expert, and marketing and business development professional. She is co-author of *The Law Firm Associate's Guide to Personal Marketing and Selling Skills* with Beth Marie Cuzzone as well as *The Woman Lawyer's Rainmaking Game* with Silvia L. Coulter. She is the Chief Enthusiasm Officer of The Legal Mocktail™, an experiential networking training program, and the CEO and Founder of the Legal Lean Sigma® Institute, which offers process improvement certifications, courses, and consulting for the legal profession. She is a Co-Founder of the Legal Sales and Service Organization (LSSO), which focuses on sales and service excellence and where Catherine directed LSSO's studies on women rainmaker lawyers' sales and business development issues. Catherine also has a private training, coaching, and consulting practice, Firm Guidance, that is focused on business development and strategy work in professional services firms.

Stewart M. Hirsch

After practicing law in firms and in-house at companies, including T.J. Maxx/Marshalls, Staples, Welch's, Waters and Dun & Bradstreet, Stewart realized that he enjoyed developing business more than doing legal work. To pursue his passion for business/client development and stay connected to the legal world, Stewart launched Strategic Relationships. For more than 18 years, through one-on-one coaching and group training, he has assisted hundreds of lawyers with developing business and becoming trusted advisors to *their* clients. He also helps executives and in-house counsel with strategic planning and provides leadership coaching. Stewart is a nationally recognized speaker and writer on business/client development topics. He has spoken at many international, national, and regional conferences, including most recently, the American Intellectual Property Law Association (AIPPLA), Texas State Bar Women in IP Task Force, Texas Women Lawyers, as well as at firm retreats on a variety of business development topics. He blogs regularly on www.trustedadvisor.com, where he offers advice on helping professionals improve their trustworthiness in business.

Kimberly Y. Jones

Kimberly Y. Jones is the Founding Attorney and CEO of Athena Legal Strategies Group, a boutique employment law and litigation defense law firm located in Boston, Massachusetts. A highly regarded, experienced attorney and seasoned negotiator with more than 10 years' experience in medium and large Boston law firms, Ms. Jones provides legal representation as well as strategic business advice to employers, corporations, and senior executives regarding personnel management, legal compliance, and employment-related matters throughout all phases of the employment life cycle. In 2006, Ms. Jones was recognized by her peers as a “Rising Star” in Labor and Employment Law and was subsequently named a “Super Lawyer” in Labor and Employment Law by *Boston Magazine*. In addition to a vibrant law practice, Ms. Jones is active on several boards. In 2008, she was appointed to the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination Advisory Board by Governor Deval Patrick. Currently, Ms. Jones is Co-Chair of the Partnerships Committee of the Women of the Harvard Club, is an active member of the Women's Leadership Initiative of the Women's Bar Association of Massachusetts and is a member of the Board of Directors of Massachusetts Service Alliance, an organization dedicated to volunteerism and community service. A classically trained pianist, Ms. Jones also serves on the Board of Directors of the Boston Youth Symphony Orchestras.