

## Women Developing a Book of Business

**W**hether you call it networking or developing a book of business or marketing, you must do it as a woman (or a man) if you are going to chart your own destiny. As Melanie D. Wilson reports in “Sentencing Inequality Versus Sentencing Injustice,”<sup>1</sup> women lag behind men in pay for equal work and in positions of prestigious employment. In fact, *Law360 Corporate* recently reported that only seven BigLaw firms have women at the helm.<sup>2</sup> To narrow that gap and to command both respect and equal pay, women need to have and control a book of business.

Rainmakers bring value to the firm. Firms take notice of the rainmakers and generally support them in tangible and intangible ways. Having a strong book of business allows you to move into management positions within the firm and possibly move onto the compensation committee. Also, a good book of business allows you the opportunity to change firms if desired or avoid being laid off when a firm down sizes because there is not enough business to keep all attorneys busy. In other words, if a woman doesn't have a book of business, her career is in the hands of others. This article addresses tips on how to develop your book of business and “stay visible.”

### Build Relationships

Early in your career, your first relationships are built within the firm. Your first sets of clients are the firm members who have business. The key is to make you invaluable to those partners by developing good legal skills and being timely with projects.

There is a potential you might inherit business from elder attorneys, but *don't* count on it. Don't fall into the trap that “if I just do good work, clients will come or clients will stay.” In today's environment, attorneys move firms, and so do clients.

Second, you need to develop relationships outside the firm. Find your passion! Your passion may be getting involved in young leadership programs or the local art museum or providing *pro bono* services at the homeless shelter. Regardless of what your passion—volunteer! Get involved in the community, politics, the bar association, or your church. The folks you connect with can

be your referral sources of future business. Also, volunteer to speak on legal topics and write articles on issues that you have learned from a case or research or you find interesting.

### Learn to “Toot Your Own Horn Without Bragging”

In order to build relationships with potential new clients or referral sources, women need to develop conversational strategies. For many attorneys, their biggest marketing challenge is the ability to speak about what they do. Most attorneys aren't comfortable talking about themselves, what they do, and how they help others. But being able to talk about your strengths in a genuine and authentic way is one of the most effective marketing tools a woman can have in her toolkit. And there are simple ways to begin to develop these skills.

One such strategy is storytelling! Men often are good at telling stories about their adventures. Women need to have a story, too. One of the most interesting books that I have read and I give to new associates in our firm is *How to Toot Your Own Horn Without Bragging*.<sup>3</sup> In the book, Peggy Klaus provides a number of strategies and exercises to help you develop your “braggables” and how you can tell meaningful and interesting short stories about you.

A woman's story can be used to deliver the communication in a simple but powerful fashion. The story can be about a recent case that you worked on and won for the client. Well-delivered stories can be an extremely effective means of communicating with a prospective client or referral source. With stories, you can build in associations that your referral source, client, or prospective client can relate to and understand.

Also, when people ask you what you do, you should *not* just say “I am a lawyer.” That imparts nothing about you and what you do for your clients. Tell a quick story about how you helped a client. The story allows you to communicate important information about who you are and what you are committed to as an attorney. If you are a construction lawyer, tell about a new construction project in the local area you helped get started by getting the contractor permits or bonds. If you are a litigator, tell about a recent success.

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Also, think about your audience. Quickly size up to whom you might be speaking. If you are speaking to a church member, tell her about the estate work you do (assuming you do estate work). If you are talking to a business owner, share a story about how you successfully guided a business through a contract or employment dispute. Have several “war stories” in your arsenal ready to share. These stories are the foundation upon which women build relationships and the client’s trust. Effective marketing is about building “know, like, and trust” with your clients.<sup>4</sup>

### **Put Your Game Face On**

Project confidence in yourself at all times, whether you are in the firm, in court, at a business or a bar association function, or at a community event or church. Don’t assume when you leave the front door of the law firm you are on your own time. You represent yourself and your law firm 24/7.

Also watch what you post on Facebook or any other social media forum, as folks are watching. Women are often held to a different social standard than their male counterparts. They are often expected to act ladylike at all times. Clients do not want

to see their attorney partying the night away at a local bar and taking “selfies.” So never post anything you would not want your grandmother to see on the front page of the newspaper or on YouTube!

### **Learn to Ask for Business in a Professional Way**

Too often, based on my personal experience, female lawyers are expected to be diplomatic and polite and not be direct and to the point. To get business, women must go the next step and be direct in their approach with a prospective client. To prepare for this, research a client or potential client’s business and industry. Get into that client’s business mindset. Don White, a consultant to law firms for new business development, says we need to get into the client’s “95 percent zone.”<sup>5</sup> What he means is to find out what is important to the client. Then relate what is important to the client to what you can do for the client. Your goal is to bring that client peace of mind and minimize that client’s potential exposure.

Once you know what is important and how you can help, then ask for the business meeting. It can be a breakfast or lunch meet-

ing or a coffee-break meeting. At the meeting, talk about the prospective client's business and the industry and then relate how you can help. Be direct and professional and ask for the business.

### Ask for Advice from Your Sponsor in the Firm About How to Develop Business

The attorney or attorneys who interviewed you and made the recommendation that you should be hired by the firm are your initial sponsors. Your sponsor wants you to succeed because he or she has extended his or her political capital on having the firm hire you.

Carmen González, professor of law at Seattle University of Law, addresses in her article "Women of Color in Legal Education: Challenging the Presumption of Incompetence,"<sup>6</sup> that in addition to mentors, women need sponsors who will advocate for them in "faculty meetings and behind closed doors when they are being reviewed for tenure and promotion." Professor González reports that part of the problem is that "senior faculty tend to choose protégées who look like themselves and to overlook newcomers who are perceived as 'different.'"<sup>7</sup> Women should use this knowledge to forge a bond with the attorney who was instrumental in hiring them.

Second, if your firm has a marketing chair, meet with the marketing chair and get advice and suggestions on how to develop business. Ask for help developing a personal marketing plan. If your firm does not have a formal marketing chair, seek out a rainmaker and ask for advice on how to build a book of business. Forge a relationship.

Women will have more security in their careers if they cultivate a book of business. If the firm dissolves, your book of business will help you move to another firm or hang your own shingle.

### Conclusion

To control your own destiny, and narrow the gap in pay for equal work and in positions of prestigious employment, a book of business is essential for every woman. Nora Bergman, a law firm coach and certified Atticus Practice Advisor, advocates making marketing a habit.

In her book, Klaus identifies 12 tips for bragging that will help you build relationships, develop your book of business, and stay visible:

- Be your best, authentic self.
- Think about to whom you are tooting.
- Say it with meaningful and entertaining stories.
- Keep it short and simple.
- Talk with me, not at me.
- Be able to back up what you say.
- Know when to toot.
- Turn small talk into big talk.
- Keep bragologues and brag bites current and fresh.
- Be ready in a moment's notice.
- Have a sense of humor.
- Use it all: your eyes, ears, head, and heart.<sup>8</sup>

To avoid having their career in the hands of others, women should implement these tips to develop their own book of busi-

ness, take control of their careers, and stay visible. Remember: everything you do and say is a form of marketing. Embrace it. Enjoy it. And have fun at developing business and building new relationships! ©

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Melanie D. Wilson, *Sentencing Inequality Versus Sentencing Injustice*, THE FEDERAL LAWYER, July 2014, at 58. Alanna Vagianos, *There Are Still Few Women at the Top of Fortune 500 Companies*, *Says Report*, THE HUFFINGTON POST (Dec. 11, 2013), available at [www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/12/11/women-in-leadership-roles\\_n\\_4418725.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/12/11/women-in-leadership-roles_n_4418725.html) (stating there is "little to no increase of female CEOs, CFOs, and board members over the past three years." For example, "Just 16.9 percent of corporate board seats were held by women in 2013, the eighth consecutive year with little to no progress in narrowing the gender gap"; in 2013, just 8.1 percent of Fortune 500's top earners were women; and "only 4.2 percent of Fortune 500 companies employ female CEOs"); Jack Stripling, *Survey Finds a Drop in Minority Presidents Leading Colleges*, THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION (Mar. 12, 2012), available at [chronicle.com/article/Who-Are-College-Presidents-131138](http://chronicle.com/article/Who-Are-College-Presidents-131138) (finding that in 2011, 26.4 percent of university presidents were women); see also Laura M. Padilla, *A Gendered Update on Women Law Deans: Who, Where, Why, and Why Not*, 15 AM. U.J. GENDER SOC. POL'Y & L., 443, 461 (2007) (indicating that 18.7 percent of law school deans were women as of the 2005–2006 academic year).

<sup>2</sup>Of the roughly 160 leadership positions at the top 100 firms on the Law360 400, only seven women currently hold the top leadership positions at their respective firms. The "septet of firm leaders serve in either a chairman, managing partner, or co-managing partner role." Experts say this is "a product of law firms failing to provide adequate mentorship and advancement opportunities." For more information, see Law360 article dated April 21, 2014: [www.law360.com/corporate/articles/530030?nl\\_pk=a836c774-f169-420d-bb52-48d78ffb461f&utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=corporate](http://www.law360.com/corporate/articles/530030?nl_pk=a836c774-f169-420d-bb52-48d78ffb461f&utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=corporate).

<sup>3</sup>Peggy Klaus, BRAG! THE ART OF TOOTING YOUR OWN HORN WITHOUT BLOWING IT, Warner Business Books, May 21, 2003/ISBN: 0-446-53179-0.

<sup>4</sup>Nora Bergman, a law firm coach and certified Atticus Practice Advisor, helps lawyers develop client development and satisfaction techniques. For more information, see: [reallifeppractice.com/about-rlp/nora-riva-bergman/](http://reallifeppractice.com/about-rlp/nora-riva-bergman/); [www.atticusonline.com/about/our-team/nora-riva-bergman/](http://www.atticusonline.com/about/our-team/nora-riva-bergman/).

<sup>5</sup>Don A. White with Don A. White Associates is a sales strategist, instructor, and coach who helps attorneys overcome the discomfort of selling and enhance their business development skills. For more information, see Don A. White Associates, [donawhite.com/index.html](http://donawhite.com/index.html) (last visited April 28, 2014).

<sup>6</sup>Carmen González, *Women of Color in Legal Education: Challenging the Presumption of Incompetence*, THE FEDERAL LAWYER, July 2014, at 48.

<sup>7</sup>This is sometimes known as the "cloning effect," and it occurs during the hiring process as well.

<sup>8</sup>Peggy Klaus, BRAG! THE ART OF TOOTING YOUR OWN HORN WITHOUT BLOWING IT.