

Luring Clients

Most successful rainmakers generate business by acting like anglers trolling for business rather than salespeople hunting for customers. **By Patrick Henry**

Partners and partner-track associates face pressure to attract new business to their firms. But if they try to act like traditional salespeople, they fail. Why?

Traditional sales-training models are patterned after hunting: stalking, aiming, firing and hitting (or missing) the mark.

Professional business development, however, is more like fishing than hunting. Attorneys generate business by acting like the fisherman in "The Old Man and the Sea." Anglers must attract fish to their lures; they can't ambush them. If a fisherman acted like a hunter, he would scare away the fish. Likewise, if a professional tries to ambush clients, most will scatter in fear.

Last year, when I made a presentation to the management committee of a 100-attorney firm, I became convinced that the fishing mind-set works.

The managing partner looked at my card that says "fishing coach" and laughed.

"Arthur [one of the senior rainmakers of the firm] would love you," the partner said. "He always says that business development is like fishing. You have to be constantly trolling."

Most successful rainmakers attract potential clients to them and their firm rather than try to "sell" their services. Here are some ways to accomplish this.

■ **Develop a purpose and plan.** Attorneys don't become great without a purpose and a plan. Successful business developers also must have a purpose and plan to generate new clients. Such a plan should consist of a strategy to attract and build relationships with decision makers and "centers of influence," those who advise decision makers.

One element of this plan should include networking. Productive networking includes constantly attracting quality people and building them into your ever-more-powerful network.

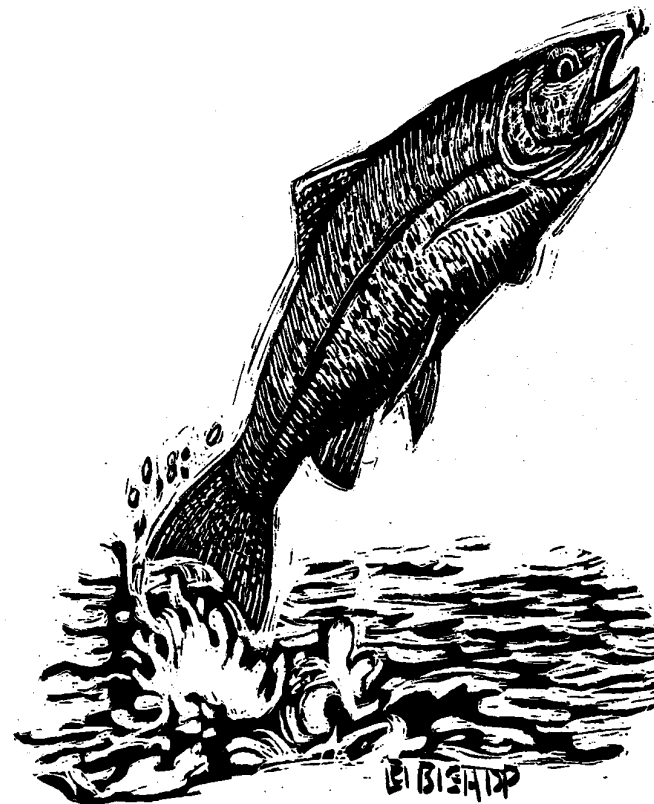
■ **Be fascinated by others.** Too often, I see professionals who meet for the first time at an event waste time talking about the Lakers' prospects or the weather. Why? They seek easy topics for conversation.

Instead, start a conversation about the one topic that is the easiest topic for others to talk about — themselves. One of the best ways to attract people is to be interested in them and their profession or business. By learning about their work, you discover who might strengthen your network.

You should ask three questions to every professional you meet after having a brief, ice-breaking exchange. These questions allow you to peer into his or her Rolodex — not by name but by category.

You should ask, "What does your firm do, what is your responsibility with your firm and what kinds of clients do you serve?" This last question is critical. A professional who serves a similar client base to yours can be a great source of referrals to you and from you.

Imagine the number of quality contacts you would make if you asked everyone you



met these three questions. Once you try it, you will see how easily you can get strangers to talk about themselves.

Asking these three "Rolodex questions" as a habit will enable you to become more discerning about the people with whom you spend your nonbillable time. It will reduce the amount of time wasted having breakfasts and lunches with people who never could be productive connections.

You benefit in two other ways by having prepared questions to ask strangers: It is a great way to overcome shyness, and because you are not busy thinking up the next question, you can listen to the answers. Listening is a powerful networking skill.

■ **Be interesting to others.** Asking the Rolodex questions prompts many people to reciprocate by asking, "What do you do?" This is your chance to do a commercial for yourself to an audience that requested it and therefore is prepared to listen.

Some refer to the response to, "What do you do?" as an elevator speech, because they believe it must be concise enough to be completed while going up or down in an elevator. This perception, however, is incorrect. Instead of giving a short, bland response, craft an answer which both tells people what you do and helps them learn about you by engaging their minds. After

all, your best law-school professors didn't just feed you information; they engaged you in discovering the answers.

This kind of engaging answer to a what-do-you-do question is called a "discovery speech." Discovery speeches consist of two parts: a compelling benefit statement, and one's unique spin. A compelling benefit statement describes an important benefit that you deliver to your clients.

Attorneys typically describe their work and specialty in a way not designed to grab attention, such as, "I am an employment lawyer," or "I am an estate planning attorney." The same words are mouthed by hundreds of others in those specialties. If you use them, as quickly as the words enter the listener's ears, he or she will file you with all the other members of your specialty who probably won't get their business.

Here are compelling benefit statements for the same specialties: "I help California companies avoid costly employee litigation," and "I help business owners pass their businesses over intact to the next generation." If your benefit statement is truly compelling, you will know it because you will hear the magic follow-up question, "How do you do that?"

This brings us to the second part of your discovery speech, your unique spin. It tells how you deliver your compelling benefit. It

must be credible, and it must draw your listener into your world view so that he or she grasps and remembers your uniqueness.

For example, the employment lawyer who leads with, "I help California companies avoid costly employee litigation," is asked, "How do you do that?" She replies, "My firm specializes in delivering those boring compliance programs to employees in an entertaining way so that they are actually put into action."

Do you want to turn a bland, short answer into an engaging discovery speech? Work with someone outside your specialty to help you craft it. An outsider's view will help you pass the "grandmother test." If you can explain what you do to your grandmother and she grasps the compelling benefit, you probably have created a great discovery speech.

■ **Conclude conversations gracefully.** The preceding skills can get you locked deeper into conversations. Have you ever been in one that went on too long, where you wanted to end it but didn't know how to get away? If you initiate more productive conversations, you must become more adept at disconnecting with people gracefully and graciously. Why? Even though the person to whom you are talking appears to be a great business connection, an even greater contact could be lurking five feet away.

The funny thing about conversations that need to be ended is that both parties are wondering the same thing, "How do I get away?" But each keeps talking to avoid hurting the other's feelings. You can make this dynamic work for you. The first step is to decide quickly whether the person is worth a follow-up meeting or phone conversation.

When you become adept at asking your Rolodex questions, you elicit information that makes this decision easy. This is because pertinent information about someone's profession allows you to assess the importance of the person to your career. You're not deciding on the merits of the other party as a person, just on whether the individual has relationships that can enhance your network.

Here is a simple conversation conclusion for someone you would like to get to know better: "I've enjoyed meeting you. I know you have others you would like to meet, and so do I. May I have your card? I will call you tomorrow to see if we can get together and help each other." Then shake his or her hand, and move on.

If you don't want to follow up, however, merely state, "I've enjoyed meeting you. I know you have others you would like to meet, and so do I. I look forward to seeing you again." Shake hands, and move on.

If you follow the three concepts presented, you will become better at trolling for new business. Although there is indeed more to learn about becoming a better rainmaker, these simple rules will accelerate your new business success.

Patrick Henry is the founder of the Referral Engine Co., which helps professionals implement a proactive networking program.