

3 Keys to Reaping the Rewards of Relationships

by Stephen Fairley

I was recently coaching an attorney at a small east coast law firm who was lamenting how slow new business has become in the past few months. As we talked, I asked him, as I ask dozens of legal professionals every week, “**What have you done in the past 3 months to build relationships with potential referral partners?**” He mentioned going to lunch a few times and speaking with a couple over the phone when they made a referral to him.

I asked him to open up his Outlook contact database; there were more than 200 non-client contacts in it including: accountants, financial planners, angel investors, business brokers, and private investment bankers.

Here's the **3 keys** I shared with him **to develop the relationships** in his “golden Rolodex.”

Take an Active, not Passive, Role

There is an old Jewish saying “A man who has friends must show himself to be friendly.” **Don't wait for someone to take the initiative and contact you**— be the first to reach out. In the last year we have coached & trained more than 2,500 attorneys and the Rainmakers are the ones who make at least 3-4 contacts with potential referral sources every week.

Action Step: Take 2 minutes and scan your contact list. **Select 12-15 names of potential or current referral sources** and send them an email or better yet, pick up the phone and call them with an invitation for lunch or coffee. Set up 3 face-to-face meetings per week for the next month.

Here's a sample script: “It's been a while since we've connected. I was wondering what your schedule looks like for the next week. I'd like to get together with you for lunch or coffee, just to catch up—my treat. Let me know what dates would work better for you.”

Increase Frequency of Contact

Try as we might, it's difficult with our hectic schedules to meet with every potential referral source on a regular basis. Here's one strategy I teach legal professionals: Set up a Google Alert for a specific phrase that would be of interest to your referral sources such as “becoming a rainmaker.” Collect interesting articles and keep them in a separate folder (Referral Articles). Once a month pull one out, print off a bunch of copies and attach a brief handwritten note on each copy (“I thought you might enjoy this article.”). Enclose your business card and mail a copy of the article to all of your referral sources.

Several of my clients have doubled and tripled their referrals in 6 months using this simple technique to **stay in front of his referral sources** on a frequent basis. You can set up a Google alert at: www.google.com/alerts

Focus on Serving Not Selling

When you meet with referral sources don't make the mistake of dominating the conversation. You are there to listen and learn, not hear yourself talk. Any attempt to "sell" them on your services will be a complete waste. Look for ways you can **serve them and their clients by connecting them with other resources** or pointing them in the right direction regarding a legal issue. Ask a lot of questions about their business. For example:

- How did you first get started in your line of work?
- What are some of the major trends in your industry?
- What kinds of challenges do you face?
- What do you like best/worst about your job?
- And here's the most important question: How will I know if I'm talking to someone who's a good referral for you?

Educate them about your Ideal Target Market and how you can benefit their clients only after you have carefully listened to them.

Rainmakers don't wait for the door to knock or the phone to ring or the referral to come in. They **take the initiative, stay in touch, and focus on serving** their referral sources, not selling them a service. Remember, people will forget what you tell them. They may even forget your name, but they will never forget how you made them feel.

*Stephen Fairley is an international best-selling author of 9 books and 5 audio programs, including **Practice Made Perfect for Lawyers** (2005) and **Becoming a Rainmaker: Business Building Strategies for Lawyers**. Stephen has spoken to thousands of attorneys at state and local bar associations on topics related to marketing strategies for solo practitioners and small law firms. Sign up to receive Stephen's report "Top 10 Mistakes Attorneys Make and How to Avoid Them" at www.rainmakerretreat.com*