



When a Barking Dog is a Good Thing: Some Tips for Success for Young Lawyers

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In my meetings and travels as Indy Bar President, I frequently find myself in one of two conversations.

The first is a conversation among Baby Boomer lawyers who are expressing concern or frustration about the things that young lawyers don't seem to know these days.

The second is a conversation among Millennial lawyers expressing concern or frustration about what we Baby Boomers don't seem to know about younger lawyers.

At the heart of all of this discussion is the desire by each generation for our newer lawyers to find success and fulfillment in our profession.

There is no shortage of sources for lawyers of all ages to receive tips on how to succeed. The tips that follow in this article are just a few that have been passed along to me by my mentors through the years. To my many young lawyer friends, I hope that they will be helpful.

1. Clients do not hire us, and we did not go to law school to bill in increments of a tenth of an hour. We were trained and we are hired to be problem solvers. If you adopt the heart of a problem solver in everything you do in the law, your clients will be better served, our profession will be better served, and you will be more successful. You can "churn" and earn or you can "turn" and earn. The best in our business turn and earn.
2. The best lawyers in our business are lifelong relationship builders. If you want to have business of your own, then you need to establish and nurture relationships everywhere you can find them. That means that you have to be out and about and doing more than billing hours.
3. Be responsive. In panel after panel of clients and general counsel at bar meetings, the number one reason cited for pulling business is that the lawyer is not responsive. If you are unresponsive to your friends, your colleagues, other lawyers, and your clients, you will slowly lose any hope of growing a business. There is no exception to this rule.
4. Mind your reputation. It takes a long time to build a reputation, but it can be lost in an instant. Many writers have said that a good reputation is a lawyer's most prized possession. Remember, however, that

reputation is more than just your integrity; it also includes your responsiveness, your demeanor, your legal ability, your attention to detail and more—including your social media postings.

5. Be thoughtful in how you communicate. Younger lawyers prefer email, instant messaging, and text messaging. Older lawyers prefer the telephone and face to face. A fair mixture of both is a good idea. If you are going to build relationships, then personal interaction with others needs to be part of it. Further, you may actually get more done if you take the time to pick up the phone and talk to other lawyers now and then (particularly to us Baby Boomers).

6. Always, always, always be on time. Clients and judges hate lawyers who are late. I encourage you to use the military definition of on time that my father taught me: “Early is on time; on time is late; and late doesn’t happen.” If you are going to be late, call or text someone to let them know.

7. If you meet me at an event somewhere or even on the street, be sure to tell me your first and last names. I go to meetings all the time where I meet individuals whose nametag tells me they are Mike or Jane or Robert or Debbie, but with no last name. If you want me to remember you and find you later so that I can make a referral or an appointment to a committee, I need to be able to find you.

8. Stay current on news. There is a lot going on around us every day that is important for you to know in order to keep and improve relationships with clients and other lawyers. If you do not have a means to learn when someone has received an award or promotion or when someone has lost a loved one, then you may miss an opportunity to send congratulations or sympathies. Little things mean a lot.

9. Get started in a bar association you like at a young age and be a persistent participant throughout your career. Every successful lawyer I know is involved in a bar association of some kind. The opportunities to build relationships, build reputation, and learn news of the legal community are all part of bar membership and active participation.

So, the last word on this subject is a simple statement that I heard years ago from a friend: “Dogs don’t bark at parked cars!” Get out there and move around, meet people, stay current, enjoy our profession. Get the dogs barking. Give yourself the opportunities for success. •

#WILLYOUBETHERE?