

"The mystery of our profession"

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Personality may be the greatest determinant in becoming a successful rainmaker, but the ways in which that manifests itself can shed some light on what makes them stand out from the crowd. Here we profile some of the skills rainmakers can't do without

Establish trust

"There is a large amount of magic in rainmaking, but when you talk about trust that is where the magic resides" – [prietocarrizosa](#) partner Martín Carrizosa

An ability to build trust among new clients is the trait most commonly cited as setting rainmakers apart from other talented lawyers. While one of the more ill-defined character traits on this list, most agree that this skill is underpinned by a blend of exceptional personal and professional skills. Among the softer skills highlighted are charisma, charm and sociability, while impeccable legal knowledge, fluency in more than one language and excellent cultural awareness were some of the professional skills deemed most essential to encouraging trust among potential new clients. [Von Wobeser y Sierra SC](#) partner Claus von Wobeser says that intimate knowledge of a particular culture often makes it easier to isolate a particular client need and offer appropriate legal advice: "It is important to identify what the client, or potential client, needs, and then understand that need and tell them why you believe your firm is capable of resolving that need. Of course it is important to know the legal areas involved, but it is also important to understand the political and business aspects too," he says.

For [Estudio Beccar Varela](#) partner Horacio Beccar Varela, rainmakers typically fall into two categories when winning the trust of clients, with the very best rainmakers combining the best elements of both. In the first category, rainmakers function as "connectors of people" and draw heavily on soft skillsets, such as charisma and charm, to establish friendships and develop broad networks of contacts that can be mobilised to add value to a client's particular business. In the second category, rainmakers tend to be "a true genius in what they are doing" and leverage an excellent professional reputation for high-quality legal work to win the confidence of clients. Beccar Varela notes that despite differences between the two approaches, both ultimately depend on the rainmaker maintaining high visibility within the field he or she operates, either through active participation in networking events and conferences, or regular publications of legal articles or academic papers.

Building trust requires being a good communicator. Silber, Vasquez & Associates executive Jeffrey Silber, who provides life coaching to lawyers and business professionals, says a popular misconception he encounters is that clients can somehow be "won" in a single meeting by those with the strongest personalities or most convincing sales pitch. Pointing out that statistically it takes an average of six instances of contact with a potential client before winning their business, Silber says part of the mystery of rainmaking amounts to setting aside time to regularly follow up with potential clients and develop a personal connection. Norton Rose Fulbright partner Elisabeth Eljuri echoes this view: "Rainmakers tend to be very perseverant in following up with contacts and clients; never just waiting for the call to arrive but actually showing initiative as well in anticipating client needs," she notes.

24/7 availability

"Nowadays, the fact that you are on a plane or travelling is no excuse" – [Barrera, Siqueiros y Torres Landa](#)



Fulvio Italiani, Valdo de Rizzo, Enrique Gómez-Pinzón, Ricardo Fandiño and Francisco Urrutia

partner Juan Francisco Torres Landa

With the forces of globalisation and demands of international capital reconfiguring economies across Latin America, rainmakers, like any lawyer with international clients, nowadays face time pressures and an intensity of competition that would have been unimaginable decades earlier.

Describing the era of "long luncheon meetings with no cell phones" as well and truly over, Barrera Siqueiros' Torres Landa notes the "incredible burden" rainmakers are under to be on call almost 24/7 and respond to the needs of potential clients around the world. "I have seen many deals where the ability to respond on the same day – or within minutes in some cases – has made the difference between being a successful provider of services and having to recognise that someone else came ahead of you and you lost the deal," he says.

As growing numbers of domestic and international companies become increasingly plugged into global supply chains linking markets around the world, many respondents cited round-the-clock availability as one of the most essential skills rainmakers must possess to win important clients for their firms. D'Empaire Reyna Abogados partner Fulvio Italiani explains that even commonplace behaviour such as returning emails or phone calls promptly can set a rainmaker apart: "The importance of availability or an immediate or prompt response is often underestimated, but it is in my view an effective way to differentiate yourself from your competitors and to show your client that you are truly aligned to their needs," he opines.

Similar around-the-clock attention also applies to generating clients. Holland & Knight LLP partner Enrique Gómez-Pinzón remembers a particular occasion when flying to the US when he realised that he was sitting next to a famous Colombian musician and decided to start a conversation. "By the end of that flight I received not only two tickets for his concert in Miami, but also became in the short term his legal adviser for his business and personal matters," he recounts.

Have the confidence to be creative

"Rainmaking is much more than just pricing or a nice bottle of wine" – Lobo & de Rizzo Advogados partner Valdo de Rizzo

Whereas in previous years it was common for a rainmaker to be known for a particular specialism in a well-defined area of law, which could be leveraged to win clients for the firm, rainmakers today must compete in legal markets featuring a vastly expanded number of rivals, each offering equally sophisticated legal advice. Within this context, the ability to win clients can depend heavily on the creativity of an individual rainmaker in offering value-added services to the client, at little additional cost to the firm.

A common example of value-added services provided by rainmakers is their ability to approach a potential

client with the solution to a particularly thorny legal issue they are grappling with, or a suggestion for a new business opportunity they may not have even considered. While such suggestions are guaranteed to impress and appear seemingly fortuitous, behind the scenes there is often hours of painstaking research; partly born of increasing demand from clients that rainmakers have a detailed understanding of their business model, market and customer base. "Clients have developed tremendously and are now more eager for law firms to bring them new opportunities and new markets, rather than previously when the firm would go and try to sell the firm," notes Gómez-Pinzón Zuleta Abogados' Ricardo Fandiño.



Martin Carrizosa, Juan Francisco Torres Landa, Horacio Beccar Varela, Claus von Wobeser and Jeffery Silber

Other value-added services may include the rainmaker's business acumen, academic background or personal connections. Indeed, even making oneself readily available, by providing a home phone number or agreeing to meet at weekends or during holidays can create the impression the client is receiving a tailored, personalised service and give a rainmaker the edge over their rivals.

For young lawyers hoping to develop their rainmaking abilities, one of the biggest obstacles often tends to be the lawyer's lack of confidence in his or her ability to go out and win clients. Drawing on the example of a talented 29-year-old female lawyer who was made a junior partner at a São Paulo firm at the start of this year, Silber explains that as recently as a year ago she still viewed her humble family background as an obstacle to her going out and winning work of her own accord. It was only when she was taught to believe in her own abilities that she discovered she had a flair for winning clients and could "cross the threshold" into the partnership.

Learn how to juggle

"Rainmakers are always thinking about new business and are creative enough to focus on opportunities" – Guerrero Olivos partner Roberto Guerrero V

With potential clients demanding higher standards of service and deep knowledge and creativity from their legal counsel, rainmakers must perfect the art of juggling to ensure sufficient time is allocated to new clients while ensuring current clients receive enough attention to maintain their loyalty to the firm.

Underpinning this ability is a mixture of impeccable organisational skills, attention to detail and quick thinking, while self-confidence, good salesmanship and creative flair also play an important role. Siqueira Castro Advogados partner Carlos Fernando Siqueira Castro says that while a number of rainmakers may possess many of these skills, possessing all is rare and he can name only "very few partners who can handle five or six large deals with an immense depth and presence in each one of them simultaneously so the client has the impression that his deal is the only one for that partner".

With many of Latin America's legal markets playing host to greater competition, Barrera Siqueiros' Torres

Landa says rainmakers are also under greater pressure to maintain higher standards of service once the client comes into the firm. For him, the "good old days" when clients would pay bills without looking at them or sign exclusivity agreements with a particular firm have "all but disappeared"; meaning "unless you have the ability to develop trust and maintain an ongoing relationship with clients, even those you consider to be institutional clients of the firm may be at risk."

Be optimistic and think long-term

"Rainmaking is a long-term, even a lifetime, project" – D'Empaire Reyna Abogados partner Fulvio Italiani

Given the competitiveness of the sector and heavy dependence on personal connections and referral networks, it is perhaps unsurprising that Latin America's practitioners single out perseverance and unwavering optimism as two of the most essential personality traits for successful rainmaking.

Without the visibility or reputation of established rainmakers, young associates looking to develop their rainmaking skills face an unenviable task. In the early stage, most client meetings will inevitably end without a contract, and even when successful, origination fees can take years to come through. Italiani, for example, says that in his experience only one in five origination initiatives are successful and remuneration can take two to three years to become effective. Carrizosa also notes that even when young associates do eventually receive their origination bonus, this will likely be a small sum rather than life-changing amount. Young lawyers will need to develop a thick skin and be tenacious to be able to compete.

Furthermore, faced with a trade-off between billable hours and rainmaking activities, lawyers will not only have to learn how to juggle, but the lack of an established network of contacts also means they have to develop their own value-added services to entice clients into the firm. The good news is that for those who persevere, the skills they develop to get off the ground will stand them in good stead to become successful rainmakers of the future.

While picking winners is a notoriously difficult proposition for firms, most respondents agree that successful rainmakers will most likely be those lawyers who consistently put the profitability of the firm above their short-term gain and enjoy the process of rainmaking (in whatever form) for its own sake. "Rainmaking is all about building and maintaining a reputation that your firm is the best or one of the best options available," explains Italiani. "Reputation is not what you think about yourself, but what your clients and your sources of referral [...] think about you, and that is what matters."

Comments

There are currently no comments.
