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# The 5 Best Ways To Improve Your Image At The Firm

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Law360, Los Angeles (March 21, 2016, 2:08 PM ET) -- In a BigLaw culture in which doing great work and hitting your billables is par for the course, it's easy for even excellent attorneys to get lost in the crowd. Boosting your image from reliable worker bee to law firm standout is essential to advancing your career, experts say.

The work comes first — there's no way to get ahead at a firm without first delivering great results to senior partners and clients. But lawyers who keep their noses to the grindstone and never look up risk languishing with all the work and few of the accolades.

There are essentially two routes to burnishing your image at the firm: developing strong relationships with colleagues and making it rain, experts say. Here, they share five tips for focusing on those two areas to improve your image among firm colleagues.

## **Be a Team Player**

Building collegiality among fellow lawyers and staff is absolutely essential, according to experts, who say it's important not to come off as a "gunner," or someone who is clearly and obviously trying to advance in the most ostentatious way possible.

"Trying to peacock your feathers will usually result in eye rolls," said Dan Binstock of legal recruiting firm Garrison & Sisson. "People don't like the person that tries too hard to get ahead of everybody, someone that's too 'in your face' about their accomplishments or their drive."

Instead, try and be a resource to everyone around you, sharing your knowledge and expertise with partners and associates of all levels, according to Gibson Dunn real estate transactional partner Farshad More.

"Midlevel and senior associates sometimes think that the end-all, be-all is billing and client interactions — and that is a big component — but being a team player and taking your fair share of the nonbillable administrative stuff is also big," More said.

Being willing to pitch in with people outside of your group is always helpful in improving your image, according to More.

"Being a mentor to attorneys that are junior to you, even when they aren't working on matters that have to do with you specifically — it's a huge thing," More said.

On the flip side: "Don't have sharp elbows with your peers," he advised. Taking credit for things that

are a result of a team effort or when others should be getting credit, or throwing other attorneys under the bus, particularly those junior to you, are big no-nos and a fast way to destroy any goodwill you may have at the firm.

### **Stick to the Golden Rule**

John Reed, founder of legal consultancy Rain BDM, says lawyers sometimes need to be reminded to follow the "Golden Rule" and treat others as they wish to be treated, no matter if they are the managing partner, a paralegal or member of the typing pool.

"If you treat not only your lawyer colleagues but also your nonlawyer colleagues with respect, that's going to boost your image," he said.

While it sounds like simple advice, Reed says it's too often forgotten by time-crunched lawyers working under extreme pressure for demanding clients, sometimes leading to disastrous consequences.

"I've heard so many war stories: You cross a paralegal or secretary and they can work behind the scenes to make your life miserable and wreck your image," he said.

Part of treating others well is giving credit where credit is due. Letting others shine shows confidence and graciousness that will pay dividends down the road, according to Ari Kaplan, a legal analyst and founder of Lawcountability.

"Self-promotion has very little to do with yourself," Kaplan said. "It's about promoting the work of others and having that reflect on your character. That's an important element of building your brand."

Reed says that placing the spotlight on others can boost your own image.

"If someone has done something great, if you can sing their praises and give them public praise or compliments, that reflects well on you," he said. "People like to get their buckets filled. When you give compliments to others, you fill their proverbial bucket. You're contributing to an overall culture.

"When you break it down and analyze it, it may sound manipulative, but it tends to be natural and organic," he added.

### **Become a Leader**

Find opportunities to lead within the firm, even if that means taking on an undesirable task and turning it into a leadership role, Reed advises. Volunteering to serve on an internal committee, testing new software or devices, or stepping up to investigate a new practice area opportunity are all things that will be noticed by both your peers and firm decision makers.

"There is always grunt work to be done in the law firm. Never let a good opportunity to get your hands

dirty go to waste," Reed said. "It's something that can generate positive attention and let you be the team player that we're talking about."

If the firm asks for volunteers for a job fair at a nearby law school, do it. More says he was genuinely interested in reaching out and readily volunteered to recruit law school students at his alma mater, Columbia University. Years down the road, "I realized it had the added benefit of raising my profile," he said.

"Doing things for the collective good where you may not necessarily receive 100 percent of the credit, I think helps," More added.

Stepping into leadership roles outside the firm is also a great way to boost your image, according to Richard I. Segal, a litigation partner with Miami-based boutique Kluger Kaplan Silverman Katzen & Levine PL.

"For midlevel associates, the number one thing to improve your image in the firm is to obtain positions of authority, in and outside the firm, particularly so that you are recognized as someone in the community who is a leader and proactive in bettering the community by giving your time to those in charitable organizations and philanthropic organizations," Segal said.

Don't just attend charity events, Segal advises — take ownership and organize the events.

"It shows that you are responsible and trustworthy to those in your firm, and it shows that you are serious in your craft because you are making yourself well-known in the community," he said. "People see you as a focal point and someone you want to send business to."

### **Step Up Your Cross-Selling Game**

No one can ignore a rainmaker. Bringing in new business is the lifeblood of any firm, so learning how to sell without selling is essential to boosting your profile within the firm.

A large component of rainmaking is cross-selling: selling new legal services to existing clients. If a client mentions she might need legal advice outside of your area, being able to quickly draw on information about your firm's capabilities and recommend a specific colleague for that work can turn into a real coup for your firm, according to Reed.

"Cross-selling is hard to pull off and should start as an internal initiative," he said. "If I want to develop more business from my colleagues' clients, providing them with talking points and representative matters of what I or my partners do, that also needs to work in reverse, it's not a handoff."

Laying the groundwork for cross-selling is an ongoing process, according to More, and it starts with sharing your time with folks within your firm who aren't necessarily the people you work with every day.

"People tend to think about business generation and client development in terms of their own expertise, as opposed to what they can do for the firm generally," More said. "If I don't know what my corporate M&A specialists do or my tax partners do, I can never seek out opportunities to develop business for the firm, even if it is not my area."

Being curious and getting informed as to what people outside of your group do is a key tool to generate business for the firm outside of your practice area, More says.

"If you don't know what you have to cross-sell, you can completely miss opportunities when having casual conversations," he said. "A lot of business isn't in the form of formal pitches, but just listening to what your clients or potential clients are dealing with. If you don't know that you have resources within your firm that can help with their problems, you can totally miss the opportunity."

### **Expand Your Social Media Presence**

A big part of developing a reputation for developing new business is building a robust network to draw on. While showing up at bar association mixers and other traditional networking events remains a useful tool for building contacts and potential future business, in this day and age, spending a few minutes a day expanding your network on social media — particularly on business-centric LinkedIn — is an easier and hangover-free approach that can end up really boosting your image, according to Eva Hibnick, a former Cravath Swaine & Moore LLP attorney who co-founded legal marketing firm One400.

"I think more lawyers should cold-contact people on LinkedIn; I don't think lawyers do that enough," she said. "They're scared that it's not a warm introduction. But I find that most people are receptive to just meeting up."

Even if you're not comfortable cold-contacting potential clients, keeping up with former law school classmates online is an easy task that often goes overlooked given attorneys' busy schedules, Hibnick says.

"Go through LinkedIn and friend-request everyone you went to law school with and keep up with your contacts," she advised. "Send them emails; if they had a baby, send them congratulations. Be genuinely caring so when something comes up, you're not reaching out [to them] out of the blue."

For lawyers who have already amassed contacts through LinkedIn that they don't know very well, spending a small amount of time getting to know those people can pay dividends in the future, according to Kaplan.

"By simply sparking conversations, the natural inclination for them is to respond. A conversation occurs and that dialogue will yield something further," he said. "Just go to LinkedIn and follow up with people you haven't connected with in a while or at all. It's such an easy way to become top-of-mind again."