



# Helping Your New Breed of Lawyers Become Successful Business Developers

By Yuliya LaRoe and Marla Grant

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Now more than ever, law firm leaders understand that the key to sustainable growth in the current business landscape depends not only on the quality of their lawyers' legal talent, but also on their lawyers' abilities to generate new business. And while lawyers are trained to excel at lawyering, many typically receive no formal training (in law school or private practice) to succeed in business development.

As the Baby Boomer generation of lawyers transitions out, it is up to the younger Gen Xers and Millennials (senior associates and junior partners typically around 30 to 45 years old) to become the new breed of business developers in law firms. The way lawyers who are part of this new breed become effective rainmakers differs drastically from prior generations, so it's critical for law firm leaders to better understand how to support these lawyers.

## What Drives the New Breed of Law Firm Business Developers?

The new breed of lawyers is driven differently and that's why they do things differently. There are a variety of differentiating factors and we're focusing on the following three factors, which we find most critical to the development of these lawyers as effective rainmakers:

- 1. They crave learning and development opportunities.** This new breed of lawyers is eager and sees the quality of professional development opportunities offered as a key job satisfaction factor. For example, [one major study by Gallup](#) reported that 59% of Millennials (as opposed to 41% of Baby Boomers) say that "opportunities to learn and grow on the job are extremely important" to them.
- 2. They value regular and ongoing feedback and support.** Gone are the days of feedback being delivered once a year via
- 3. They care about using their strengths and finding their own unique approaches to doing things.** [Another Gallup poll, "2017 State of the American Workplace,"](#) showed that lawyers in this new breed, who seem to value autonomy and independence even more than prior generations, put greater emphasis on their ability to "integrate their talent (the natural capacity for excellence), skills (what they can do), and knowledge (what they know)" into their careers. In other words, they want to find unique approaches to excel at work by using their natural talents and strengths.

impersonal performance reviews. The new breed of lawyers likes knowing how well they are doing throughout the year, so that they can make the necessary adjustments and obtain the support, mentorship, and coaching they feel they need to confidently achieve their goals.

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## What Law Firms Can Do Better to Develop Their Future Rainmakers

Here are a few tips on what progressive law firms can do to more effectively develop their future rainmakers:

### Tip #1: Provide structured, formal business development training programs.

When it comes to business development, unlike their predecessors, the new breed of lawyers is no longer satisfied with being thrown into the “deep end” to “figure things out.” They are looking for more meaningful and directed business development training that can help them ensure their success.

For your firm’s business development training to be most effective, the program must be:

- **Regular and ongoing.** While one-off trainings such as workshops and seminars are good, in order for your firm’s

attorneys to actually generate real results, the program needs to include regular interactions (weekly or bi-weekly) and last six to twelve months.

- **Focused on action and implementation.**

The program must contain opportunities for attorneys to implement what they are learning in the program. For example, one practice group at an Am Law 100 firm included the following activities as part of their attorneys’ business development training: looking up their law school classmates on LinkedIn for updated job and contact information; and researching other practice groups and attorneys in those groups that hold potential for cross-selling opportunities.

- **Based on a comprehensive, easily accessible business development curriculum.** The new breed of lawyers values autonomy and flexibility and is tech savvy. So, for example, a firm

could offer online training modules that attorneys can access on their own schedule. Importantly, in addition to solid business development strategies

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and tips, the curriculum must include training on critical mindsets, attitudes, habits, and other soft skills needed to become an effective rainmaker — for instance, resilience, courage, listening skills, and patience.

### Tip #2: Offer ongoing practical support and accountability through coaching.

The new breed of lawyers wants to receive ongoing feedback and coaching in real time. Business development coaching is an essential success tool for lawyers because most lawyers are uncomfortable with “sales” and fear appearing “salesy.” Yet, they realize how important business development is to their long-term career success. Coupled with solid training, business development coaching helps lawyers clarify their goals and develop a systematic and intentional approach focused on their individual strengths, while also helping them to overcome their fears and challenges. Moreover, coaches serve in the critical role of an accountability partner and help lawyers prioritize and stay focused on their goals. Individual coaching (or a mix of group and individual coaching

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sessions), whether offered internally or through external coaches, has proven to be the most powerful.

Jennifer Rakstad, Esq., Career Development Advisor (US) at Mayer Brown, shared: “At

Mayer Brown we have run a successful business development training and coaching program for our new partners for many years. This combined training/coaching program produces excellent results. The new partners receive foundational training on business development best practices and skills and then work one-on-one with

a coach for several months to focus in on refining and executing their business plans. This approach has helped them to get the right start on their life as a new partner and to begin building their book of business.”

**Tip #3: Focus the training and coaching on helping each lawyer develop their own approach based on their unique strengths and personality styles.**

The new breed of lawyers has made it clear that they don’t want to have to change who they are to be an effective rainmaker. Many shy away from business development because they have a misperception that they have to do it the way their predecessors have done it and essentially change who they are. This challenge is exacerbated by the fact that many of the senior rainmakers can’t relate to this discomfort because they either are too far removed from starting out in business development or have completely different personality styles. It’s a game changer for lawyers to learn that

they can capitalize on their own innate personality styles rather than trying to become someone else. One law firm partner who used to “hide behind his desk to avoid networking and business development” shared that learning how to build, nurture, and leverage key relationships “without compromising my character or really deviating at all from who I am” was critical to his success as a rainmaker.

Just as this new breed is the largest growing segment of future business developers, they are also the largest growing segment of new clients. That’s why it’s more important than ever to really understand what they value and want — and not just as lawyers, but also as clients. By adapting to the needs of the new breed of business developers, law firms will have greater success at ensuring their continued growth and future legacy. ■

