

# MAKING RAIN

## How to Bring In the Business

### Law firms are turning to sales coaches to shape up their marketing efforts

Though lawyers sell their cases to judges and juries every day, many attorneys have a much harder time selling themselves to potential clients.

So why would lawyers—not known for being tongue-tied wallflowers afraid of a little networking—need to hire a rainmaking coach?

“The reality is that the business of law is a lot more competitive than in the past. Clients are more demanding, and there is more of a tendency to shop around,” said Jill A. Pryor, a partner at Atlanta’s Bondurant, Mixson & Elmore.

But the need for sales training goes beyond economic conditions. Pryor explained, “I think like a lawyer, not a marketer.”

Thanks to time spent with a rainmaking coach, however, Pryor is learning to think like a lawyer *and* a marketer. Two years ago, her firm, in its “ongoing awareness of the need to be more entrepreneurial,” turned to business development coaching as one way to remain competitive, she said.

### Hiring a Coach

Bondurant retained marketing coach Robin Hensley, of Raising the Bar, an Atlanta-based consulting firm, and made her services available to any partner who wanted them. Though partners pay their own way, the firm picks up the tab for the associates closest to partnership who want coaching.

In Bondurant’s program, the coach meets with each student one hour per month, with a half-hour phone conference between meetings. The coach and the lawyer set individualized goals, analyze situations and address problems according to the attorney’s personality



**Marketing coach Robin Hensley’s fees start at \$250 an hour, and she contracts with lawyers for at least six months.**

and aspirations. Over time, the attorney develops a good picture of individual strengths and weaknesses and sees long-term progress, Pryor said.

Hensley is a former Ernst & Young accountant and marketing director at two Atlanta law firms. As a business development coach, she has worked with attorneys at such firms as Kilpatrick Stockton and Ford & Harrison.

She said her services are needed because most lawyers just want to practice law—and they give very little thought to marketing themselves. “Many people know what to do—they just don’t do it,” she said.

### Ways to Reach Out

Timothy S. Rigsbee, a Bondurant associate, echoed that sentiment, saying that having a coach helped him take action. He cited one obvious, but still effective, technique he learned: sending a short, handwritten note to new contacts. He said that after receiving his note, a number of people he met at the recent American Bar Association annual

conference told him they’d contact his firm if they had business in Atlanta.

Less obvious examples include sending a “tax season survival basket” (containing items such as Gatorade, protein bars and a small calculator) to a CPA responsible for referring a great deal of business, or donating money to a nonprofit in a client’s honor during the holidays instead of sending a generic gift of fruit or chocolate. These gestures reaped tangible—increased business—and intangible—appreciation and admiration—rewards for the attorneys, Hensley said.

### Worth the Cost?

The motivation to take these steps doesn’t come cheap. Hensley’s fees start at \$250 to \$300 an hour, depending on the number of attorneys within a firm who’ll use her services. She contracts with lawyers for a minimum of six months, so a typical monthly regimen of a one-hour, in-person meeting and a half-hour phone conference could run about \$3,500 to \$5,400 per year.

For Pryor, though, the expense has been well worth it. The coaching “has paid for itself many times over,” she said.

Hensley offered an example of the financial benefits one of her clients reaped. One client, a name partner in a mid-size firm, wanted to boost the amount of business he brought to the firm from \$3 million to \$5 million within two years. By focusing on the most lucrative clients, studying their industries, asking for feedback and otherwise listening to and seeking their long-term needs, the lawyer met his goal.

“The partner was blown away by the success,” Hensley said.

—John Hanusz