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Mastering the Art Of Self-Promotion

By **Carol Morganstern**

Many lawyers make partner based on hard work and being a good lawyer. Once they enter the partnership, they look around and say, “What is the next brass ring?” or “How do I get there from here?” Hard work alone will not propel your career forward to its highest possible level; you are going to need to be savvy at the art of self-promotion. This includes going outside of your firm to get new clients and letting those inside your firm know about your accomplishments to propel you up the corporate ladder.

As a law firm partner, you are already adept at many of life’s challenges. The next point is to be intentional about getting to the next step. Often, this takes unlearning tools and behaviors we were taught in a different time, to survive in a different environment. It is unlikely that any of our parents spent time teaching us the appropriate manners for a law firm partnership. While the art of self-promotion comes easily to some of us, it makes many people uncomfortable and unsure. However, to really maximize your hard work

as a lawyer, you need to let the world know about your successes — and nobody can do it all for you. Self-promotion is a necessary part of achieving the highest level of career success.

BE A LITTLE LESS OF A TEAM PLAYER

A common mistake that some partners make is doing good work and expecting that someone will notice and reward them for it. We should all be team players, but sometimes, we also need to be individuals. If you write a winning brief that really changes the landscape of a case, it is OK to take credit for your brilliant idea and admit that it was great work. Yes, there was a team on that matter, but your work was spectacular. Don’t be afraid to distinguish yourself as an individual. Push that same concept further: Did you come up with something unique that would be of value to other clients? Go out yourself and market that win. If you are unsure how, tap the marketing professional and ask, “How can I turn this into client opportunity for myself?” Do not let someone else move forward in the market with all the glory, even if that person was your mentor. Any good mentor will want to see you succeed and will be

proud of your efforts to market your accomplishments.

TRACK YOUR SUCCESS

Each and every time you are on a deal or a matter, you should be tracking your experience and successes. Often, deal lawyers capture information on deal sheets, but litigators fail to keep this log of representative matters. You should also keep information about your personal responsibility on a deal or matter; just the title or overall information is not enough. This document will be invaluable when putting together pitch materials and can also be something that you can review prior to client meetings (and even cocktail parties where prospective clients might attend). Imagine the power of the numbers when you can look down at your log and see that you have now successfully taken more than 50 expert depositions — and use that number in pitch materials. Internally, it is fantastic for responding to emails from other partners looking for help or expertise on a matter. If you are competing for internal work, this list can easily be utilized to show your expertise and track record of success, instead of trying to recall what the issues were in that matter you worked on 18 months ago.

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We all tend to forget the things we did last year, but recording that information can allow you to see where you can position yourself in the market. Most people I know that are great at business development do this as a basic habit and have an updated list ready at the drop of a hat. Finally, this is an invaluable tool if you are exploring a job transition, or if out of nowhere your dream opportunity presents itself, and you decide to suddenly interview for a new position.

PREPARE YOUR ANSWERS IN ADVANCE

When someone at the annual meeting asks you what you have been doing this year, mention your recent deal or successful motion. While it is extremely important to make a personal connection — and not completely dominate the conversation with a detailed account of your recent expert deposition — it is helpful for people to think of you as a strong successful lawyer. Being shy or afraid of self-promotion will not do you a lot of good when competing internally for referrals or cross-selling opportunities. While you may think that others are aware of your recent deal because there was an internal email or it had recent press, it is still helpful for your career to discuss it.

This is a great opportunity to review your list of personal successes before going into a meeting where self-promotion may be helpful. What are the top three you want to discuss? If it is helpful, practice what you might say. As lawyers, we always do better with a little preparation. Give a little info but don't make it too long, and beware the canned speech. It needs to sound natural, even if the first few times it is not.

THE BUDDY SYSTEM

Two people who graciously sell the other's skill and expertise can

magically walk through marketing events looking great and not feeling like they spent the time promoting themselves. Sometimes this can be a great first step in the art of self-promotion, as most people are much more comfortable saying how great their colleague is rather than themselves. The pitfall here is that you might come off scripted and too much like a salesperson. What you want to do is find opportunities to point out how proud you are of having them as a colleague or point out recent success, again, without letting it dominate the conversation. The only thing worse than spending time talking up your own boring expert deposition is talking about someone else's, especially when there is the chance you might not get the story right.

SELL YOUR FIRM, SELL YOUR PLATFORM

Another very easy sell should be to explain why your firm is great for a prospective client's work. You should also be able to tell anyone on the street the unique attributes of your firm in the market and why it is a good choice for your clients. All of your friends and family should generally know what makes your firm unique. Again, the trick here is not to brag or give a long uninterrupted speech. Bonus points if you can do this without saying something negative about your competitors. This is an easy step into personal self-promotion because clients not only choose the firm, they also select their lawyer.

TAKE A COMPLIMENT GRACIOUSLY

When someone says what a great job you did on something, thank them and say that you are very proud of the result. While you can discount

a bit to not come off over-confident (if you must), you should not spend minutes discussing how lucky you were or how sometimes the facts just line up. Instead, you can discuss the unique situation and how you were able to see a unique solution.

In the end, there are a lot of opportunities to share your success stories to allow you to maximize exposure — without going over the top. If this is particularly difficult for you, spend time listening to others at networking events and take note of how often others are appropriately sharing information that puts them and their firms in a positive light.



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