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from my book -**

**The Marble and The Sculptor:
From Law School To Law
Practice**

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RELATIONSHIPS ARE THE CURRENCY OF BUSINESS

Clients can come from a number of sources. Maybe you take out ads in the local phonebook, bid on certain phrases in Google Adwords, have a fancy website, or someone just walks into your office because it was close to the courthouse. These clients are hit or miss at best. They might have a good case, in a field of law that you practice. But they are just as likely to be self-indulgent and have no basis for needing a lawyer.

The best clients come from your “network” —the people with whom you have relationships. Someone who already knows you, who knows your practice and trusts you, is likely to going to refer someone to you who fits your practice. Essentially, these potential clients will have been “pre-screened” by your network and are much more likely to have a viable case or problem, rather than wanting to sue the government because their brain is being scanned by weather balloons.

The wider and deeper your network, the more likely it is that you are going to be referred potential clients. It naturally follows that one of the most pressing questions new lawyers ask is: **how do I grow my network?**

1. **First and foremost, you have to be present.** You have to be in front of people. You have to go to events. Rotary club, art classes, wine tastings, Bar events, CLEs, luncheons, softball leagues, etc. Anything and everything you can think of, but get out from behind your computer. Making connections with people on social media doesn't count. A partner at a mid-size firm told me he always chides associates when he finds them eating in the kitchen/break area at the firm. Meeting a lot of new clients in the firm break area? Building relationships with

78 • The Marble and the Sculptor

other people in the community while you're heating something up in the microwave? If you've got time to eat lunch away from your desk, you've likely got time to be eating lunch with someone else.

2. Being present is the first step, but it's not enough. **You have to be involved.** Offer to help. Volunteer to be on a committee, write a news- letter, speak at events, coach your kid's soccer team. Expect nothing in return. Make sure whatever you do, you treat it with the same respect and dedication that you do with your work. Volunteering to help is essentially displaying your work ethic to everyone involved. You can either be seen as someone who is doing the bare minimum, or you can be seen as the type of person who goes above and beyond when they are involved on a project. Bottom line: invest in a community, and the community will invest in you.

3. The good thing about being present and involved is that it will force you to interact with people you don't know. In case it isn't clear at this point, **growing your network will involve talking to lots of strangers.** If your response is "But I don't like mingling with new people/I'm not good in new situations" — shut up, put this book down, and come back in a few years when you're ready to be an adult. You don't want to interact with strangers? Who the hell are your clients going to be!?

4. **Be persistent.** Many people join a club, or some other sort of activity, attend a couple times, fumble around without any results, and write off ever trying to network. This is akin to trying to ride a bicycle one time, not being able to do it, and then swearing off bike riding for- ever. If you're not the outgoing type, it's unlikely that you're going to be establishing lasting bonds with people the first time you attend a wine tasting class. You have to be steadfast in your commitment to growing your network. As Edison said, "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work." Keep going to classes, groups, and events. Over time, you will be able to build relationships with other people.

5. The number one thing that people fail at in networking, which leads them to think that networking is useless, is that **they never extend the relationship.** You would think it's a plainly simple thing to do, but the majority of people fail

at it. As relationships are established, you will have to extend them outside of where the relationship originally began. You're never going to grow a relationship with a person at some cocktail hour with 100 other people there. Large social gatherings are

Relationships Are the Currency of Business • 79

there for introductions—a chance to make the initial contact, trade business cards. Once you've made the contact, the onus is then on you to reach out to the other person.

In reaching out to someone on a higher level of prestige and experience, many people will do this with some sort of wimpy email or note that says, "Let's grab lunch sometime!" If the person you are trying to reach is busy and successful, you're likely to never hear back from them. Instead you need to send an email to them like this:

Hey [Name],

Great seeing you the other day at [event]. I really enjoyed speaking with you about [stuff you talked with them about]. I wanted to grab lunch and speak with you more about [stuff, or things tangentially related to it].

I'm available next week on [give a couple options here]. If that doesn't work for you, let me know what's convenient and I'll work around your schedule.

or

Hey [Name],

Hope you're having a great week. I spent some more time thinking about [issues the other person was having at work] at [event]. I had some ideas that I think may be able to help you out with [issues]. Let's grab lunch and we can go over them.

I'm available next week on [give a couple options here]. If that doesn't work for you, let me know what's convenient and I'll work around your schedule.

Both of the examples reference where you spoke, what you spoke about, set an agenda for extending the conversation, and provide dates to make it happen. All of which is much more likely to get a response than a bland "let's grab lunch sometime."

80 • The Marble and the Sculptor

6. In building a successful network, **the follow-up is the most important part.** It's like the follow through of a baseball pitcher. Their movement doesn't cease just because the ball has left their hand. Once you've had lunch or coffee or a meeting, you have to follow-up with a handwritten note. Not an email, not a phone call. Go out and buy nice stationary — not with your firm logo on it. Handwrite the address on the envelope, don't use a label. Use an actual stamp, not office meter. Thank the other person for their time. Let them know you're available if they ever need anything.

Personally, I have had great success with the above plan. I've spoken with many other successful people — lawyers, doctors, MBAs — and they all follow the same plan to some degree. Quite frankly, it's nothing new. It's the same recipe for successful networking that people have been using for decades. But I guarantee you that someone is going to read this book, try the above plan, and get nowhere. Then I'll get angry emails saying that I'm a liar or don't know what I'm talking about.

The trick with the above plan is that your intentions must be genuine. The angry person is going to forget an essential part of step number 2, even though I'm writing it twice:

Expect nothing in return. Make sure whatever you do, you treat it with the same respect and dedication that you do with your work.

You can network all day long, but if your mind is not in the right place, it's unlikely that it's going to get you anywhere.

FIVE BASIC MISTAKES TO AVOID IN YOUR FIRST JOB AT A FIRM

1. Rule #1. Also referred to by seasoned attorneys and judges as “key witness Mr. Green.” Always make sure you get paid.

For someone at a firm, this means that when you begin to work on a project, make sure you get a billing code. Keep track of your time and bill accordingly. This seems like a simple thing, but many people are not familiar with the billing systems of law firms and law school doesn’t actually do that much in the way of getting graduates prepared for it.

There are a variety of methods for doing this, ranging from complex automated software packages to the humble legal pad.¹ Just find what works for you, and make sure you are diligent in keeping your time. This is true even in matters that are flat fee arrangements. Why? Six months after you have resolved a matter for a client, they decide that your fee was too high and file a complaint with the ethics committee of the bar. Being able to pull out a database, or tracking list that shows all the work you undertook in the matter, will go a long way to diffusing their complaints.

If you are striking out on your own, this means that you need to understand accounting. Accounts receivable, income statements, balance sheets, statement of cash flows, etc. If none of those terms mean anything to you (and if you went from some sort of humanities in college and directly into law school it is unlikely that they do), you really

1. The legal pad being my preferred option.

120 • The Marble and the Sculptor

need to put everything else on hold until you do. The practice of law is a profession, but a law firm is a business. If you're on your own you have to be able to do both.

Find a local college, community college, or library and reach out to them regarding their small business programs. They usually offer some good, cheap basic accounting seminars or classes for small businesses. Oftentimes, regions and municipalities will have small business outreach programs as well. You can likely also find programs that specifically target woman- and minority- owned businesses.

If you're really hard pressed and can't find anything like the above in your community, you can always go online, though this is the second best option. Why? As should be clear by now, meeting with people in real life is essential to growing your practice. You know who else is at small business accounting seminars? Other small business owners. Guess what small businesses often find themselves needing? Legal services.

2. Being unprepared. Always walk into another lawyer's office with a legal pad and pen.

There's nothing worse than walking into a lawyer's office unprepared. Having to step in and begin discussing a project and having to excuse yourself to get something on which to write, or worse, ask the attorney for something on which to write, makes you come across as inexperienced and amateurish. This is true whether you are in an opposing counsel's office or that of a senior lawyer at your firm.

Wait, I take that back. There is something worse than walking into a lawyer's office unprepared: walking into a lawyer's office unprepared— along with someone who is prepared. This is doubly true if you do so at your own firm. The senior lawyer is immediately going to look at you and the other associate and conclude that you are likely short lived at the firm.

3. Not knowing when the game is up. Always ask for a schedule or time frame for completion.

In a firm, sometimes lawyers don't have a time frame in mind, or only a vague one at best, when they ask you to undertake a project. Yet, when they do want the results of your project, they will want them immediately. Don't get caught with your pants down; press the attorney as much as you can for some sort of deadline. Then, under-promise and over-deliver. Say you'll get it done by then, but turn it in early.

Five Basic Mistakes to Avoid in Your First Job at a Firm • 121

The same is true if you are on your own. Courts will handle their own scheduling, you just need to make sure you abide by it. But you do need to be mindful of scheduling when it comes to deliverables for your clients. This gets back to managing expectations. If you're not the sort of person who is naturally organized, that needs to change immediately. Whether you adopt a scheduling system like Getting Things Done or use a simple wall calendar, you need to be able to lay out all of your responsibilities and tasks in a way that you can be organized.

Some legal matters might only span a couple of weeks. Other can take years. Either way, organization will carry the day.

4. Picking the wrong road. Always try to get some guidance as to what form the end work product should take.

Sometimes lawyers might want a formal memo, but often times they just want a quick email detailing some issue. Or maybe they want a breakdown of the formatting codes from an insurance company, in which a spreadsheet might be a better option. Or maybe they tell you they want a general description of an issue, as they are just going to forward it to a client. Regardless, you need to know where you are going with the work product. Don't be in the position where you are halfway through a project and not have a clue if it's actually what the senior lawyer wanted.

The same is true if you're working directly with a client. If a client asks you about a legal concern, you don't always need to give them a detailed, 20 page brief on the issue. Communicate with the client and make sure you clearly

understand what they are looking for. It will save you time and the client money.

5. Picking the right road, but choosing the wrong car. Find an internal sample or similar version of the project on which you are working.

Different firms will have different policies and procedures in how they handle certain memos, drafts, letters, etc. It's important that you conform to those policies and procedures as soon as possible. The easiest way to do this is just to find similar work product that has been done before. Look on the internal network server. If the firm doesn't have one, look in recent files. Best bet: find the most seasoned paralegal/legal assistant there and become friends immediately;

122 • The Marble and the Sculptor

they always know where everything is located. The projects given to new associates are generally boilerplate stuff—you're too green to be given real problems that require creative and unique solutions.

Yet if you're on your own, you don't have anyone in the office to turn to. This is yet another occasion that illustrates the importance of developing a wide and deep network of other attorneys you can rely on. If you are presented with a matter in which you are unsure of how to proceed, pick up the phone and call someone you know who has handled a similar matter before. Discuss it with them. Find out how they handled it.

What if you don't know anyone who has handled such a matter before? Reach out to your network or local bar and ask around until you find a lawyer that does. Then—*GASP*—cold call that lawyer and introduce yourself. It's really that easy. I've cold called at least a dozen lawyers asking about an issue or for advice on a topic. Every single one of them returned my call and spent at least thirty minutes speaking with me. Why? Experienced lawyers know the value of having a network, of "having a how can I help?" attitude and mindset.

If the matter is really too big and complex and you feel uncomfortable in handling it on your own—yet you want to learn about it—co-counsel with a competent attorney who handles such matters and split the fee. This is a regular

practice among a large number of solos and small firms. Most lawyers will be happy to co-counsel with you and appreciate the phone call. Beyond helping provide competent representation to the client, you'll also build relationships with other lawyers.

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