

Being a Rainmaker: Acquired Skill or Inherited Trait?

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Just the title of a recent ALM survey of new partners — [New Partners Ambivalent About Rainmaking](#) — gives one pause.

Yet there it is: just 49% of new partners surveyed said their ability to bring in new business was an important factor in their being promoted to partnership. The vast majority — 84% — said they were promoted because they perform first-class legal work.

Say what?

Is business development such a dirty word at law firms that new partners don't realize its importance to their success? Without someone bringing in new clients, there is no law firm. Doing first-class legal work is what keeps you employed; it's a prerequisite, not a differentiator.

The New Jersey Law Journal recently [profiled](#) several firms that are actively engaged in teaching associates how to be rainmakers.

"There's an unlimited need for professionally proficient attorneys who also bring in work," said a managing partner of one of the firms, who called business-generation abilities "both a power within firms [and] the source of independence professionally."

The head of Princeton Legal Search Group, a recruiting firm, said that business development proficiency is now a factor for firms recruiting associates, something that was unheard of 15 years ago.

The New Jersey firms profiled have all instituted business development programs for their associates, and are firm in the belief that rainmaking is an acquired, not inherited, skill.

Sure, not everyone is cut out for the sales side of the law. But it is a skill that can be learned and honed over time. Law firms that weave rainmaking into the fabric of their culture will always see better results than those that do not.

It's time that law firms shake off the old-fashioned belief that business development is beneath them. Those days are gone forever. With more lawyers than ever competing for a finite amount of legal work, don't fool yourself: it is your ability to make rain that will determine your success and that

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