

I work really hard, why aren't I being promoted?



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Marketing – is it more than cocktails and golf?

You work hard, you exceed budget, your clients are happy with you and you are starting to think that yes, you are a good lawyer. Why is it that you don't seem to be getting much recognition at work? Isn't being a good lawyer enough?

An often overlooked difference between private practice and other legal roles is that a practitioner's legal ability (and their ability to meet budget) is only part of the story. Let's face it, a law firm is a business and while most junior lawyers will answer in the affirmative when asked whether they understand that a law firm is a business, few understand what this actually means and how it affects them.

It may come as a shock, but no matter how experienced you are in your chosen field, your value to the firm will ultimately be measured by your contribution to the growth of the business. This is not to say that there is not room for that person who just puts their head down and works, but increasingly this is not enough. Very often as a practitioner you need that something else, particularly when you work in a legal environment that is becoming more and more competitive.

What can you do as a junior practitioner?

Three words – marketing, marketing, marketing.

For many junior lawyers "marketing" means very little and is often misunderstood. It is however, contrary to popular belief, more than just free drinks, attendances at client seminars or golf (for those of you inclined). Marketing encompasses many things and it can raise your profile, help you develop relationships and ultimately help you grow your practice and the firm's business, and it just might get you that promotion.

Different firms will have different marketing expectations of practitioners, but the one thing that is certain is that they will have marketing expectations.

The very thought of marketing can conjure up images of sleazy salesmen. But it doesn't have to be that way. Ultimately, it must be remembered that effective marketing is a long-term enterprise and, as such, must be broken up into bite-sized pieces.

So here are some tips which will hopefully demystify the process and help make it a little less daunting.

Establishing relationships

A junior practitioner will generally already have established relationships with friends and acquaintances in the legal and other industries. However, a lot of those contacts may also be in the early stages of their career, and as such, not yet in positions of influence. It is nevertheless important to foster these relationships, to ensure, at the very least, that you maintain them.

The easiest way to establish new relationships is to be involved in something that interests you, whether it be a team sport, a professional association in your area of expertise or a recreational club.

Establish relationships with practitioners within your firm. Internal referrals can be just as vital to the profitability of your practice group (and the firm as a whole) as external clients and referrers.

Nurturing relationships

It's important to nurture the relationships you establish. People are more inclined to engage your services or refer their contacts to you if they know and trust you.

When thinking about ways of nurturing relationships, be creative – there is life beyond cocktail parties and golf. Try to choose activities that are of interest to the person you've invited.

Ask questions. People want to feel confident that you understand them and their business, and also want to feel that you are interested in them and their business.

Nurturing the relationship is an ongoing process (even after you have been given the business). If you are not the practitioner responsible for doing the work, make sure you are up-to-date with what is happening, and make sure that you check in with your client regularly to ensure that they are happy with the level of service they are receiving.



Exposure

Writing articles is a great way to gain exposure. Choose your market, but remember that your market includes other practitioners who at various times will refer work to other practitioners due to a conflict of interest, limited capacity or lack of expertise in the relevant area.

Don't forget internal exposure. Make sure that other practitioners within the firm know who you are and what you do.

Seminars and CLE presentations are also great ways of gaining exposure. If that sounds terrifying, start small. An internal CLE presentation to other junior practitioners is a good start.

Support from your firm

Hopefully your firm will match its marketing expectations with support and training.

Good training can help with practical skills like public speaking and networking. After all, chatting to strangers is not everyone's forte. If your firm does not provide practical training the LIV and other organisations run plenty of courses that can help.

Joining associations and attending events generally cost money. This can be a challenge for more junior practitioners as a firm may be reluctant to spend its marketing budget on you. It's worth remembering, however, that many professional associations provide at least a few free networking events for members, so if you only have a limited budget some associations will be better value than others.

Marketing is serious business but it should also be fun (most of the time!) and the more you do it the easier it will become. So get yourself out there and practice. ■