



Career Doctor

NALINI MOORE, MAHLAB

Dear Career Doctor

I am a third-year solicitor at a smaller mid-tier city practice. I enjoy my work and the people I work with, but I am finding that I am being overlooked when the good work gets allocated, or when an opportunity to attend client functions arises.

I do not think that the senior solicitors at my firm are intentionally bypassing me as I believe I am doing a good job, and I do not want to leave this group because I like my practice area. However, I need to know what I should do to raise my profile within (and outside) the firm, so that I get considered for the larger matters and the client lunches. Any advice?

Ignored

Dear Ignored

This sounds like a case of you needing to be “the squeaky wheel”. You are quite justified in feeling that you need to be just as well recognised as other junior solicitors for the quality of work you produce. You might be right about this being unintentional behaviour, but no one likes to be overlooked in the workplace. So let us look at some strategies to raise your profile.

You have recognised some very important factors in developing your career, especially in this competitive job market. To be successful in your career you need to foster valuable client relationships, perform well in your role, produce good quality work, and more significantly be recognised by others as a good performer and valuable team member.

Here are a few suggestions:

1. Try the direct approach and speak to your supervising partner. Discuss your interest in working on larger matters and becoming more involved with clients, and suggest ways you could do so. For example, suggest that you attend the next marketing event or client function, or express your interest in a current matter that your partner is working on. As you mentioned, it may be just a case of being unintentionally overlooked. Once your partner is aware of the situation, he or she will be in a much better position to assist and include you. You may need to follow this initial discussion up a couple of times to generate results. But doing this will give you the opportunity to develop something in common – your interest in the client and the client’s work.

2. If you feel that you cannot approach your supervising partner, enlist the support of an influential senior associate or partner. You can explain your situation and see if he or she can make any suggestions. If they are supportive of you achieving your goals and can offer some insights and strategies, it will make things a lot easier for you.

3. You mentioned that you would like to remain in your current practice group. It is important to remember that anyone could be a potential client or a fantastic referral source. So if you are not being given the opportunities you want in your practice group, you may still be able to attend other firm functions or other group’s functions. Similarly, the senior associate or partner whose help you have enlisted may also be able to keep you in mind for any related work that is delegated or directed to your practice group. You need to be very careful here as you do not want to tread on other people’s toes.

4. You could enlist the support of a mentor outside the firm. Often people more removed from the situation can more easily identify issues and suggest ways to deal with them in an objective way. An external support system can be helpful in any case as it is another way of monitoring your progress.

On a broader note, you may wish to also put the following tips into practice:

- Consider who needs to know that you exist. For example, who is the person responsible for allocating work tasks, inviting you to functions, appointing you as their solicitor and the like? Devise a plan to make yourself known to these people.
- Try to attend as many firm social functions as you can. This provides an opportunity to meet or get to know better other partners and solicitors in your firm in a more relaxed setting.
- Get involved in writing articles relevant to your specialist area that can be published. Offer to make an inhouse presentation on your area of expertise. And to get mileage out of the work you have already done, you could then arrange an external seminar for existing and potential clients to attend at which you would be one of the presenters.
- Join related industry organisations and professional associations. Try to attend as many industry seminars and events as possible. These functions provide an excellent forum in which to meet existing and potential clients. Remember to take your business cards with you!
- Move beyond initial introductions and find out about people’s businesses and interests. Put in the time and effort to develop professional relationships that you believe to be worthwhile. When someone impresses you as a potential client, do some research on their organisation and next time you meet, suggest ways you and your firm could assist them with certain projects or challenges they are facing.

And the most important thing to do – make sure people know what you are doing. Tell them (in a career development sort of way) and keep notes to refer to when your annual appraisal comes around.

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