

Leading Law Firm Rainmakers—2008

Sixteen attorneys—selected for their acumen in developing books of business, as well as their expertise as lawyers—share their experiences and personal pathways to success.

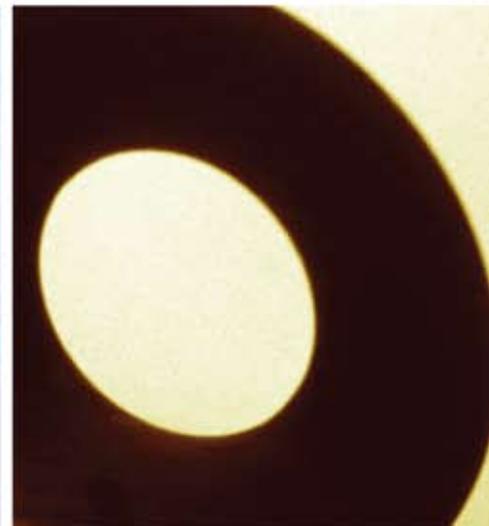
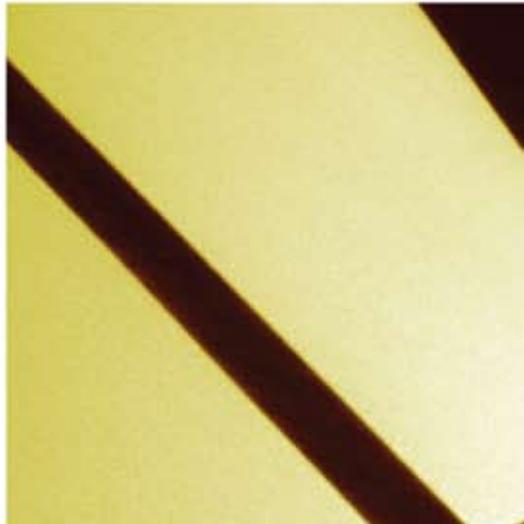
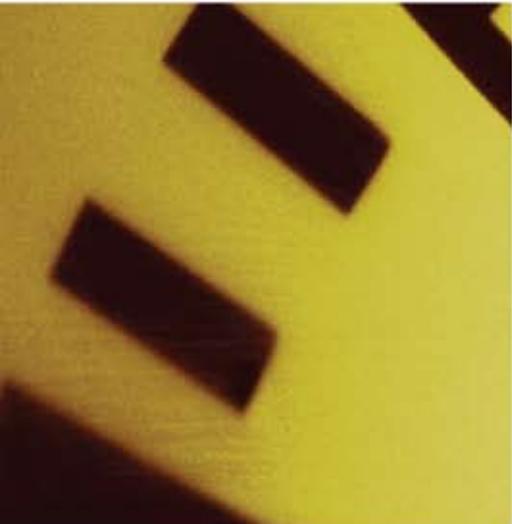
By Patrick Folliard

Surely it comes as no surprise that it takes more than substantive legal skills to achieve success in today's leading law firms — it requires demonstrated success in business development. The pressures and demands related to putting together a notable book of business are nonetheless very much on the forefront of lawyers' concerns.

For *Diversity & the Bar's* second annual rainmaker feature, a group of sixteen attorneys share their thoughts on the importance and execution of results-oriented business development. Although the lawyers are quick to point out that they have no magic formula or secret sure-fire strategy to attracting and keeping clients, they all seem to agree on at least a couple of components involved in successful rainmaking: The two key phrases that reappear throughout their reflections are "building relationships" and "client service." They advise that associates start working on professional relationships early, and assiduously nurture them throughout their legal careers; and that attorneys be there for their clients (24/7 if necessary) in supplying them with the highest quality legal services possible.

This year's featured rainmakers were selected from a pool of nominees suggested by leading firms from across the country. Each of these minority attorneys boasts a regular book of business reaching or exceeding \$2 million a year. In making its selections, MCCA weighed the attorneys' geographic locations and areas of specialty, as well as their gender and ethnicity, in order to present the most diverse and well-rounded assembly possible.

Our group of attorneys profiled in the following pages contends that, while the stereotypical partner wheeling and dealing on the golf course still exists, the disciplined partner making strides through long hours of preparation and substantive performance is more today's rainmaker norm. Interestingly, the majority of these attorneys interviewed bristle at the term "rainmaker." One describes the expression as conjuring up images "too heavy on wining and dining," while another says the title "simply sounds too over-the-top" for her. Distaste for the idiom aside, these lawyers value the rewards—particularly the autonomy with regard to working on matters that he or she finds personally and intellectually satisfying—that come with ongoing business development at the highest levels.



South/Southwest

Veronica Smith Lewis

Partner

Vinson & Elkins LLP
Dallas, TX

Years Practicing: 22

Area of Practice: Antitrust;
Intellectual Property; Commercial
Litigation



Clarence Risin

Shareholder

Baker, Donelson, Bearman,
Caldwell & Berkowitz, PC
Knoxville, TN

Years Practicing: 14

Area of Practice: Litigation



“Business development weighs heavily on the minds of younger attorneys,” says Veronica Smith Lewis, a partner in Vinson & Elkins’ Dallas, Tex., office. “I tell them to focus on ways to provide value to clients, and then the business will flow. Don’t worry so much about how you’re going to make money, but rather how you can make things better for your client.”

Lewis also stresses authenticity. “I don’t play golf and can’t go out and pretend that I do. It’s important to find things that you enjoy doing and make them into business development experiences. I have three children, so I’m on the board at their school, I attend fundraisers for candidates and causes I care about, and I go to a lot of bar-related events. All of these activities have generated business.”

On her road to becoming a rainmaker, Lewis moved up incrementally. There was no “break-through” moment. She says, “I concentrate on what’s at hand. My first clients were the partners at the firm. I worked hard to provide them a valuable service and to be responsive and proactive—the same things that I would later bring to external clients as a partner.”

“And now that I’m a partner,” Lewis adds, “I appreciate young associates who come up with ideas and suggestions. It’s a key indicator to me that an associate is a teammate, as opposed to an executor of my directions. Partners, like other clients, are looking for attorneys who are fully engaged.”

“My advice to associates who want to succeed in business development is to start early, be patient, and do quality work. It’s difficult to get clients, but it’s very easy to lose them,” offers Clarence Risin, a litigation partner in Baker Donelson’s Knoxville, Tenn., office.

“I realized as a young associate that it’s never too soon to start looking for clients, but keep in mind, it takes time—sometimes years from making that initial contact with a person or company to them becoming a client. Also, once you have a client, make sure to do quality work because if you don’t, they are going to leave. It’s that simple.”

Risin’s first brush with business development took place when he was an associate. A pleased client began to circumvent the partner and ask for Risin directly. Overnight, he was loaded down with scores of cases. “I tell associates to work hard,” he shares. “Opportunities present themselves every day just by doing a good job.”

“Never pass up a chance to meet a potential client,” adds Risin. “I have found clients at minority counsel program events. I don’t meet a new client every time I go, and there are concerns that not all the participating companies are serious about their commitment, but it’s a unique opportunity and you never know.”

Midwest

Philip L. (Phil) Harris

Partner

Jenner & Block LLP
Chicago, IL

Years Practicing: 25

Area of Practice: Business
Litigation; Complex Product
Liability; Mass Tort Defense



Donald S. Prophete

Shareholder

Ogletree, Deakins, Nash, Smoak
& Stewart, P.C.
Kansas City, MO

Years Practicing: 18

Area of Practice: Labor and
Employment Litigation



“Not all partners are rainmakers. There are a number of well-compensated service partners at large firms who have no portable book of business,” notes Phil Harris, a business litigation partner in Jenner & Block’s Chicago, Ill., office. “They’re typically partners who have effectively competed for business in the firm’s internal marketplace, and usually are considered indispensable by a very senior partner. Most often, these partners are white men. But they are the exception: For most partners, bringing in business is a fact of life.”

In today’s market, says Harris, he is compelled to spend at least twice as much time thinking about business and business relationships than preparing a case for trial. For him, worrying about economic viability is more stressful than anything related to product liability litigation. If he could reverse the time spent on business development and trying a case, he would be happier in his practice, which includes serving as national and regional trial counsel for a large automotive manufacturer in product-liability disputes.

“Because of the weight placed on business development, it’s important to pick a firm that shares your values, where you are at ease with the way partners interact,” explains Harris. “I enjoy working in an environment where the business relationship is bigger than me. I couldn’t be comfortable at a firm where everyone is focused on their book of business and is ready to jump ship if they don’t like their compensation package.”

“The term ‘rainmaker’ implies a magical ability,” comments Donald Prophete, a shareholder in Ogletree Deakins’ Kansas City, Mo., office, “when in fact marketing and business development skills are acquired through quotidian efforts, including practice, planning, and execution. People who generate business are typically—though not always—good lawyers who have a passion for marketing. They do something every day to get closer to their goal. There are no born rainmakers.”

Specific business development approaches need to be tailored to fit an attorney’s strengths, according to Prophete, a Boston University School of Law graduate who is nothing if not persistent. As a budding rainmaker, his objective was to represent the best companies in the world. He achieved his goal by identifying and researching the companies he wanted to represent, and then approaching them. He did this every day for years, eventually compiling a very notable book of business.

Prophete executes his plan one day at a time. He is careful not to become too enamored with each success, or too discouraged by failure. “For every new client, there are 30 rejections,” he says. “It’s important to remain focused on the work at hand.”

“Most lawyers are frozen by the notion of having to become salespeople,” he adds. “Business development is essentially about developing relationships, and that can be learned. No one should be afraid.”

Cedric C. Chao*Partner*Morrison & Foerster LLP
San Francisco, CA**Years Practicing:** 30**Area of Practice:** Litigation**Eddie Wang Rodriguez***Partner*Mintz, Levin, Cohn, Ferris,
Glovsky and Popeo, P.C.
San Diego, CA**Years Practicing:** 14**Area of Practice:** Mergers
& Acquisitions; Private Equity
Financings

As a young litigation partner at Morrison & Foerster, Cedric Chao was one of two lieutenants for James J. Brosnahan, a senior partner and major rainmaker at the firm. “We lieutenants pushed cases forward on a daily basis,” he says. “While working on those cases, I was active in the bar and developing a profile of my own. Toward the end of my tenure with Jim [Brosnahan], I was bringing in business and needed to concentrate more exclusively on those matters.”

Prior to joining Morrison & Foerster, Chao worked for three-and-a-half years as a federal prosecutor in San Francisco. “I strongly recommend the experience to anyone looking to become a trial lawyer. Veterans in the U.S. Attorney’s office are more than happy to hand off their work to young attorneys. I was constantly on my feet: evidentiary and bail hearings, initial appearances, motions to suppress, jury trials, and federal grand jury proceedings,” explains Chao. “After a few years, trying cases became second nature. Instead of worrying about how to form questions and get around objections, you are able to focus on the art of advocacy. In litigation most civil cases settle, but to have maximum leverage, it’s essential that the other side know that, when push comes to shove, you know how to try a case.”

Like many first-generation lawyers, Chao has what he calls the “hunger factor”: “It’s what makes me want to succeed, to go the extra mile for my clients. Now it’s something I look for when hiring young associates and law students.”

“My most marked trait as a rainmaker is my willingness to spend a lot of time with clients—sometimes more than I should,” says Eddie Rodriguez, a corporate partner in Mintz Levin’s San Diego, Calif., office. “It takes time to gain a client’s trust and to create the sense that this is going to be a long-term relationship. Really, it’s a lot like dating. My clients know that I’m available to them 24/7.”

Rodriguez first realized the importance of business development when the dot-com bubble burst in 2001. At the time, he was a service partner at a firm where he was running merger and acquisition deals in the office for other partners’ clients. “When the bubble burst, partners understandably began to hoard their work,” remembers Rodriguez. “I knew then and there that to succeed and work at a certain level, I needed my own client base.”

Because he is a minority in the profession, Rodriguez believes he has developed a keener perspective on the business environment than some mainstream attorneys: “Minority partners who become rainmakers typically are those who are able to perceive their unique status and make it work for them—often, our success depends on capitalizing on those sometimes—subtle differences.”

At his next job, Rodriguez stepped up his game by building a corporate practice from nothing, and when he joined Mintz Levin in 2006, he arrived with a substantial book of business. “If you have a big book of portable business, you are in better position to control your own destiny and hopefully affect change in the firm.”

West

Robert J. Romero

Partner

Hinshaw & Culbertson LLP
San Francisco, CA

Years Practicing: 20

Area of Practice: Litigation



Ray L. Wong

Partner

Duane Morris LLP
San Francisco, CA

Years Practicing: 30

Area of Practice: Business
Litigation



For litigators to excel in business development, they must win more cases than they lose, says Robert Romero, a litigation partner in Hinshaw & Culbertson's San Francisco, Calif., office. "Litigators must also—by persistence and design—secure opportunities to work on good cases," he adds. "It's important for litigators to build relationships over the long term—among my clients are folks I met in my first years as an associate.

"When I began practicing in 1988, I thought I'd never get to a \$1 million book of business. It struck me as unachievable," remembers Romero. "So when I finally reached \$1 million about 10 years ago, I was pleased, but realized that the challenge was to maintain and grow my business even further. I understood that in a national firm like Hinshaw, \$1-million wasn't the big deal I thought it was, and I set to work on increasing the business by multiples of that amount."

For Romero (who manages Hinshaw's San Francisco office and sits on the firm's diversity committee and the seven-member management committee), the joy of rainmaking extends beyond the financial rewards and autonomy involved; it also allows him to share work with and develop other lawyers. With that, says Romero, comes a responsibility. "It's tough but rewarding," he concludes. "There's always someone else out there telling your client that they can do the job faster, better, and less expensively. I try to keep my focus on delivering quality work and results. Good results cannot be overstated. Results matter."

"There are no substitutes for excellent work — no shortcuts," reiterates Ray L. Wong, a business litigation partner in Duane Morris' San Francisco and Los Angeles offices. "Ultimately, clients are looking for attorneys who will solve their problems competently and efficiently."

Wong is all about doing things right. "I believe in the golden rule of law: Treat clients as you would like to be treated, and that includes quality work, reasonableness of fees, and responsiveness. In other words, provide what you'd want."

Wong remembers his early days as a rainmaker. "I was aware, yes," he recalls. "It's a wonderful experience when a client calls you and says, 'I want to hire you as my lawyer.' It's a major step and a great feeling of professional responsibility and satisfaction when someone is trusting you personally with their legal matter.

"When you begin to bring in business, the firm notices. In this day and age, attorneys who have control of business and of certain clients are definitely in a better position."

Does it feel good to be a rainmaker? "Frankly," says Wong, "I don't like the sobriquet all that much; however, it's become such a common part of the profession's lexicon that you can't get away from it. I don't think of myself as going out and trying to make rain, but more as providing excellent representation and service, and hopefully that means the client will want to use me and my firm for other matters in the future."

Mid-Atlantic

Paolo Di Rosa

Partner

Arnold & Porter LLP
Washington, DC

Years Practicing: 17

Area of Litigation:

International Arbitration and
Litigation



Mid-Atlantic

Keith M. Harper

Partner

Kilpatrick Stockton LLP
Washington, DC

Years Practicing: 14

Area of Practice: Native
American Affairs



“A bicultural background is not required for international arbitration, but it helps. Typically, at U.S. firms, a partner working with a Latin American client might speak a little Spanish, and associates or foreign attorneys are brought in for the language and cultural aspects,” says Paolo Di Rosa, who grew up in Paraguay but came to the U.S. to attend Harvard University and then Harvard Law School. “At Arnold & Porter [where Di Rosa is head of the international arbitration practice], we have a number of bicultural and bilingual attorneys at the partner level.”

“As a young associate, I thought of ‘rainmakers’ as the guys who had a knack for finding business on the golf course,” says Di Rosa. “That’s not really my style. I like to think that a large part of whatever success I have achieved so far is related to the quality and cost-effectiveness of the work. Language and cultural issues play a part in that; at Arnold & Porter, we tend not to spin wheels dealing with misunderstandings due to that sort of issue.”

Clients also appreciate that, prior to joining the firm, Di Rosa was with the U.S. State Department and worked with Latin American governments, so he understands how they operate. “At 30, I often went out as lead negotiator of a treaty for the U.S., and many times my counterpart was the minister of justice or attorney general of a Latin American nation. Through the work, I forged relationships with high-ranking officials that quite unexpectedly have become helpful with business development today.”

“When you represent tribal governments, you are representing communities with their own unique cultural framework,” explains Keith Harper, a litigation partner and head of the Native American affairs practice group in Kilpatrick Stockton’s Washington, DC, office. “Still, Indian country is like everywhere else when it comes to business development: It’s all about knowing people and doing good work. Tribal leaders have ample opportunities to talk among themselves, and they tend to make legal referrals by word of mouth.”

Prior to joining Kilpatrick Stockton, Harper (who is a member of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma and a graduate of New York University School of Law) was a litigator at the Native American Rights Fund and head of its DC office. Although Kilpatrick Stockton had done Indian law prior to hiring Harper, it did not have a designated practice group until Harper joined the firm in 2006. Harper arrived with a vision to make Kilpatrick a one-stop legal shop for tribes, and now it is.

“Currently we represent tribes from the top of Maine to the Arizona/Mexican border and many places in between,” says Harper. “I’ve litigated treaty right claims, negotiated and litigated religious freedom claims, but questions of sovereignty are my favorite. I believe where native communities can be self-determinative—define their own legal structures, political systems, and normative framework—that is when they’re at their best and tend to flourish.”

Weldon H. Latham*Partner*Davis Wright Tremaine, LLP
Washington, DC**Years Practicing:** 35**Areas of Practice:**

Corporate Diversity Counseling

**Yoon-Young Lee***Partner*Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale
and Dorr LLP
Washington, DC**Years Practicing:** 20**Area of Practice:** Securities
Regulatory and Enforcement

There was a Fortune 50 client with whom I had the privilege of serving on a committee during the Clinton administration. For five years, the CEO told me that he didn't need my services," recalls Weldon H. Latham, corporate diversity partner in Davis Wright Tremaine, LLP's Washington, DC, office. "Then late one Sunday night, the CEO called and said that he needed to see me first thing Monday morning. He became my biggest client for the next five years. I got the client because I consistently made the pitch."

Persistence, says Latham, is what makes him a rainmaker. Following up with clients, convincing clients that you are the one who can best help them, and finding new clients on airplanes, conferences, political conventions, wherever—these are some of the elements of successful business development.

"Performance is essential as well," adds Latham. "Having represented 40 Fortune 200 companies in the last several years, I've been very successful with a niche practice. This doesn't happen without referrals, and typically referrals are the result of good work. It's important to develop a skill to sell. Otherwise, you have nothing to be persistent about."

"Ultimately," says Latham, "the name of the game is high billable hours, high billings, and high collections. The only way you get there is by doing something of value for the client."

After graduating from Harvard Law School, Yoon-Young Lee joined Wilmer Hale's Washington, DC, office as an associate in its securities practice group. Twenty years later, she is still there—only today, Lee is a partner with a sizable book of business and a member of the firm's management committee.

"Whether you remain in the same job or move around, the process of business development is basically the same: It's about building and fostering relationships," says Lee. "However, there are some advantages to staying at one place for a long time. During my years at WilmerHale, I've worked with many people who, at some point or other, left the firm and then became my clients. They know me, my area of expertise, and where to find me."

Remaining in the same practice area for most of her career has also worked to Lee's advantage, she says. Though constantly changing, the securities industry historically has involved a small group of institutions and players, including government regulators and in-house personnel. "You work with the same people all the time," says Lee. "Now many of the people I met as an associate are general counsels, compliance directors, and in one case, the CEO of an investment bank. It can be very helpful."

"Over the years, I have grown into the role of rainmaker," reflects Lee. "But believe me, there was never a detailed plan to do so. Sometimes I look around and think, 'How did this happen?'"

Mid-Atlantic

Michele A. Roberts

Partner

Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP

Washington, DC

Years Practicing: 28

Area of Practice:

Commercial Litigation; White Collar Criminal



Grace Speights

Partner

Morgan, Lewis, & Bockius LLP
Washington, DC

Years Practicing: 26

Practice Area: Labor and Employment Litigation



As a young public defender in Washington, DC, Michele A. Roberts noticed that there was a presumption of incompetence about lawyers who were doing her job. “This misconception about public defenders prompted me to prove my commitment and my talent early on,” says Roberts. “To the extent that I’m competitive now and make it my business to be the best lawyer in the room, it stems from my needing to prove my excellence to the world and to my clients when I was starting out.”

Today, Roberts is a litigation partner in Akin Gump’s Washington, DC, office. And though she has been repeatedly ranked among DC’s very top litigators by her peers, she remains reluctant to acknowledge her rainmaker status: “The good news is that after 30 years of practicing law, people know who I am. Even better is that a lot of people think I’m very good at what I do. I’m considered one of the significant personalities at the firm, and I hold my own at generating business. As immodest as it might sound, I guess you could call me a rainmaker.”

During her eight years as a public defender, Roberts spent a lot of time outside the conference room and the court. That’s how she continues to practice law. “Hunting new business is a lot like hunting down witnesses,” says Roberts. “It takes you outside of the office. You don’t find new clients by sitting around, waiting for the phone to ring.”

For Grace Speights, the rise to rainmaker at Morgan Lewis began 10 years ago. Speights never set out to be a rainmaker. As a first-generation attorney, she says, “big firm stuff was new to me. I’d been a general litigation partner at the firm for some time when the chairman of our employment class action practice asked me to join him as co-chair. Our labor and employment group is one of our marquee practices.”

As co-chair, Speights helped lead the effort to grow the complex employment practice. Today, Morgan Lewis is on the short list for those cases, and Speights is now sole chair of the department.

“Many young and mid-level associates spend a lot of time thinking about how they can bring in business. They often forget that their number-one client is other lawyers in the firm,” says Speights, who was the first female African American attorney to make partner at Morgan Lewis, and recently was named managing partner of the firm’s Washington, DC, office. “You become a rainmaker by working with the firm’s existing clients, and initially the way to them is through partners and the more senior attorneys.”

“My business development style is not overbearing,” adds Speights. “But if I see an opportunity where a potential client might need my help, I’m quick to reach out to them. After all, business rarely drops in your lap.”

Northeast

William A. Escobar

Partner

Kelley Drye & Warren LLP
New York, NY

Years Practicing: 27

Area of Practice: Litigation



Northeast

Keila Ravelo

Partner

Hunton and Williams LLP
New York, NY

Years Practicing: 15

Area of Practice: Global
Competition



"All of the business that I have brought to the firm is performance-driven, as opposed to any marketing strategy," notes William Escobar, co-chair of Kelley Drye's litigation practice group. "It comes from people who have seen me on the front line of litigation, those who've seen me try significant cases. Not long ago, a trial adversary recommended me to one of his clients."

As junior associates at Kelley Drye in the early 1980s, Escobar and his peers were not encouraged to make aggressive inroads into business development. "Of course, things have changed a lot since then," he says. "I'm glad that I was allowed to focus on developing lawyering skills, but sometimes I wish I'd been aware of the need for business development sooner so I could have been mining that earlier on in my career."

Escobar entered the profession without a foundation of social and family contacts. He focused exclusively on becoming a trial lawyer and developing the skills that realizing his goal entailed. Early on, he took many depositions and, over time, worked on cases that went to trial. Escobar put himself out there, and eventually people began to take notice.

"My business development success isn't the result of a master plan," he notes with a chuckle. "But I will say that I've always been very focused on my work and willing to put myself in situations that demanded some risk for the rewards. Sometimes that pays off."

Unlike some rainmakers, Keila Ravelo did not set out to assemble a big book of business as a young associate. "My ambition was to develop an expertise," recalls Ravelo, a partner in global competition in Hunton and Williams' New York, N.Y., office. "I worked very hard and little by little clients—existing and potential—began to see exactly what I could do. Eventually, I found myself in a position where I was able to sell them my skills."

Becoming a rainmaker, according to Ravelo, takes more time for litigators than for attorneys in other areas of practice. "Litigators really need to establish a track record," she says. "And there seems to be a longer trajectory on the litigation side—as opposed to corporate—to get to the place where your peers are the ones making the business decisions."

"At some point, the phone starts ringing and clients are calling for your input, to kick around questions of litigation risk or straight commercial advice," continues Ravelo. "If you keep up with those relationships, when the client encounters a real problem you will be the person they call for help, and business will progress from there."

Ravelo adds, "Rainmaking can be very tough, but it is also satisfying. If you develop business in areas where you want to become successful, then by definition, success means working on matters you care about. You'll feel a connection to the work, and that's important."