

# **The Legal Intelligencer**

## **Friends in High Places: The Rainmaker Mentor Program**

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In 2011, the Philadelphia Diversity Law Group introduced an initiative focused on the retention and advancement of diverse associates. The group recognized that the ability to generate a book of business and be indispensable to client relationships was critical for diverse lawyers to advance in large law firms. Key to establishing those relationships and ultimately a book of business is hands-on instruction in what it takes to be a rainmaker. The Rainmaker Mentor Program was designed to address the lack of access diverse attorneys often have to the networks, contacts and business relationships all attorneys need to ascend to partnership.

Research studies by the Minority Corporate Counsel Association (MCCA) and the American Bar Association suggest two significant reasons for high attrition rates among diverse attorneys in large law firms: (1) firms fail to fully integrate diverse attorneys into the organization; and (2) diverse attorneys are not afforded full and equal access to the work, resources and relationships that are critical to the success of any lawyer. A 2009 study by the MCCA highlights differing perceptions between demographic groups about client development and relationship opportunities in large law firms. Seventy-three percent of white lawyers reported being satisfied with opportunities to participate in business development efforts with important firm clients, compared to 58 percent of minority lawyers. Twenty-two percent of minority lawyers felt excluded from informal networking opportunities, compared to 11 percent of white lawyers. A study by Catalyst similarly showed that minority lawyers reported overall dissatisfaction with business development opportunities.

Having a substantial book of business has become the major currency in law firms for obtaining power and job security. Therefore, the ability to effectively develop business is critical to long-term success. In his article titled "Partners Without Power? A Preliminary Look at Black Partners in Corporate Law Firms," Harvard Law School professor David B. Wilkins talks about the significance of the external market for clients and how important it is to have a "reservoir of connections" to compete for new business and internal referrals.

### **The Rainmaker Mentor Program at Ballard Spahr**

The Rainmaker Mentor Program pairs an established partner with a diverse associate. Several PDLG member law firms agreed to participate in this initiative. Diversity leaders at Ballard Spahr met to discuss how to make the best match.

The associate mentee we chose is fairly junior and has partnership aspirations. Moreover, he is ambitious, with demonstrated maturity, and someone who would willingly take on the mentee role. The rainmaker mentor we selected is a successful partner in both business and in practice; he is highly respected and has a track record of demonstrating genuine interest in the success of young lawyers. He is also socially savvy and well connected in the community.

Both lawyers live in Philadelphia and have civic and social interests in the city. They also work in different practice areas. The rainmaker mentor is a business and finance partner, and the associate mentee is a litigator. We instantly saw the benefit of a cross-practice match as it relieves pressure from the partner–associate dynamic. The fact that there was no working relationship between the two lawyers alleviated concerns about the associate being evaluated, supervised or favored by the mentor.

It would be untrue to say that we discerned all these factors prior to choosing our pair. In fact, it was the opposite. While we were fortunate to have many choices, one particular match just seemed right. Their individual qualities and characteristics now can be seen as establishing the best practice in matching and contributing to this initiative's positive results.

The formal match concludes in September, but based on the outcomes we have seen and heard, it is exceeding all expectations. As we assess the outcomes of the initiative, we highlight what made this match successful. The rainmaker mentor should have the following characteristics: diversity insight, a superb reputation and a spectrum of contacts.

- **Diversity insight.**

The mentor should be aware of the state of diversity in the profession and in the firm through personal experience or from serving on the diversity committee. He or she should have demonstrated interest, concern and empathy for the issues that impact diverse lawyers.

- **Superb reputation.**

The mentor should be highly regarded within the firm and the broader legal and business communities. His or her endorsement should be valued and carry weight inside and outside the firm.

- **Spectrum of contacts.**

His or her contacts should be broad and deep, ranging from the professional, political and civic to social.

The mentee should be a rising star with partnership aspirations and the enthusiasm to commit additional time and effort to this initiative.

- **Rising star.**

The associate should be a rising star, yet junior enough to welcome the new experiences and to have the time to cultivate newly learned skills.

- **Partner aspirations.**

It is no secret that the brass ring of partnership has lost its luster and appeal to some associates. However, the associate should aspire to partnership.

- **Enthusiasm.**

The mentee must be willing to enthusiastically say "yes" to all invitations offered by the mentor. He or she must accept and follow up on all opportunities and advice.

The success of the program should be measured by the associate's augmented skills, relationships and contacts. He or she should have greater name recognition among firm, business and community leaders. The long-term measure of success will be whether the new relationships and opportunities translate into new business for the associate.

Key measurements:

- Did the associate learn new business development skills?
- Does the associate have access to relationships, people and opportunities that he or she might not have otherwise had access to, but for the relationship?
- Was the associate's internal and external profile raised as a result of the relationship?

We realized from this experience that all young associates need a well-rounded arsenal of mentors, champions and sponsors. We are developing the Rainmaker Mentor Program in all offices for all lawyers within a defined class year. It is our hope that the professional development of our young lawyers includes in-the-field training on cultivating business relationships. The best practices learned from this initial match will cast the model for a new component of a firmwide mentoring program at Ballard Spahr.

The fortunate outcome is that this pair of lawyers has become friends. That is perhaps the finest way to enrich business relationships. •

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