Rainmaker Q&A: Kelley Kronenberg's Howard Wander

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Howard L. Wander

Howard L. Wander is a principal partner and the chief operating officer at Kelley Kronenberg. He has helped lead the strategic growth and direction of Kelley Kronenberg, and was directly involved in developing the firm into a multi-office Florida practice. He opened the West Palm Beach office more than 20 years ago, where he currently serves as managing partner. In addition to his leadership role with the firm, he continues to maintain an active litigation and trial caseload in the areas of insurance defense litigation and property and casualty, with a focus on representation of employers, third-party administrators and insurance carriers.

Among his professional achievements, Wander is AV Preeminent rated by Martindale-Hubbell, which indicates the highest professional and ethical standards and is the highest rating a lawyer can receive. He has been recognized as a “Power Leader in Law” by the South Florida Business Journal, a “Legal Elite” by Florida Trend magazine, as well as a “Top Lawyer” in the South Florida Legal Guide. He was also recognized as a “2010 Legal Impact Leader” in South Florida Business Leader magazine and was honored as a “Leading Lawyer” in the South Florida Business Journal’s Book of Law in 2012.

Q: What skill was most important for you in becoming a rainmaker?

A: Follow-up, follow-up, follow-up ... Rainmakers live or die by follow-ups! Following up with a prospect is a key component of the client acquisition process. There are many steps I take when following up: (1) Determine your best approach for your prospect. No lead is the same. Calling or emailing to check in does not necessarily help move the process forward; (2) Build rapport first. Relationship building is the foundation to a long and solid business relationship. It’s not just about the sale; (3) Determine if your prospect is indeed the decision maker; and (4) Provide all of the necessary information so your prospect can make an educated decision on whether or not to proceed with you.

Always be willing to talk to anyone and everyone. You never know who you are going to meet. You may meet someone who does not fit your prospect profile, but just because they don’t fit, does not mean they won’t know someone who does. Be patient and try to learn quickly about those who you meet. Assess their abilities to connect you to those who may be a perfect prospect. Be patient and give people a chance to share about themselves, before you write them off of your prospect list. Being creative in networking is always a great way to lead you in the right direction of getting to “yes."

Q: How do you prepare a pitch for a potential new client?

A: Researching and doing due diligence of your potential client, as well as understanding their legal needs, is a time-consuming process that must be addressed before any pitch. Using public records and online databases assists in finding out as much as possible about their current and past litigation challenges, as well as any other problems they may be facing. Not only do you need to understand the client/company, but it’s just as important to know in advance as much as possible about the person you will be meeting with. These days, through social media and online data, finding out about someone is just a click away.

Lastly, if you think your meeting will be more difficult than usual, perform a mock meeting with your colleagues who truly understand the sales process. They can provide you with honest feedback and may think of something that has not crossed your mind.

Q: Share an example of a time when landing a client was especially difficult, and how you handled it.

A: I stayed on top of a prospect for a year and a half without being too pushy. They never said “no,” so in my opinion, this prospect was still alive. Knowing the balance of being persistent, and not annoying, is a learned skill and key to landing a client. Even though I initially thought the lead was cold, I kept on it and eventually came across a moment of opportunity. I learned that my prospect would be attending a seminar and figured I would seize the moment to meet in person. We eventually landed the six-figure client who we now have an incredibly strong relationship with. It comes down to finding different ways to connect with prospects and hearing 100 “nos" for every “yes."

Q: What should aspiring rainmakers focus on when beginning their law careers?

A: Keep up with the ever-changing world of technology, social media, legislation and regulations pertaining to their practice area of focus. Develop insight into industry growth, trends and what business sectors may become the next hot industry. Sometimes being a rainmaker is not an innate talent, but it definitely can be learned. Not everyone has the interpersonal, networking, public speaking and time management skills often needed for rainmakers. Reading, watching TED talks and taking classes in these areas can really help prepare for real life opportunities during the rainmaking process.

Q: What’s the most challenging aspect of remaining a rainmaker?

A: These days, most successful decision makers have a jam-packed schedule. They are up early and have their entire day already scheduled. They’re bombarded throughout the day with telephone calls, emails and other communications from sales professionals and rainmakers — all in an effort to get their attention.

I constantly try to develop new and innovative ways to make contact with decision makers. Whether it’s attending an industry luncheon, or participating on the same panel at a conference, there are many out-of-the-box ways to develop relationships with those who can provide you with an opportunity to prove your value. Staying positive after hearing many “nos" can be a downer for the thin-skinned. It’s important to put your personal feelings aside and be resilient.