



Sharing Success

The Newsletter of the Women in the Law Committee

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An Interview with Patricia K. Gillette

by Patricia Trombetta Smith



Patricia Gillette is a partner in the San Francisco office of Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe, LLP, practicing Employment Litigation primarily for the defense. She focuses her practice on all aspects of employment law, including class actions in addition to multi or individual plaintiff cases, representing their employers. In addition to the litigation portion of her practice, she also counsels employers on preventative personnel practices and is a frequent lecturer to management groups across the country. Pat has been actively involved in national projects focusing on women in the legal profession and is a frequent writer and speaker on topics involving women. She is the founder of the Opt-In project, focusing on changing the structure of law firms to allow for the retention of women in the workplace. She also served three years as a Commissioner on the ABA Commission on Women in the Profession, co-chaired the No Glass Ceiling initiative for the San Francisco Bar Association, is a member of the ABA Gender Equality Task force and chairs her firm's Women's Affinity Group. She has been named a San Francisco Super Lawyer every year since 2004. Pat first became a member of DRI in the early 1980's.

What characteristics are consistent across gender for a rainmaker today?

I was interested in finding out the characteristics of rainmakers and if there was any gender difference between successful female and male rainmakers. I partnered with Lawyer Metrics to determine the characteristics of present day successful rainmakers using psychometric testing and behavioral interviewing. That study revealed that across gender there are four characteristics of highly successful rainmakers. The first is called engagement. It is the desire to be regularly engaged in a particular work related activity and to essentially become immersed in it. Secondly, successful rainmakers share what can be described as dominance, but others simply call leadership. Successful rainmakers are, thirdly, people that motivate others, can manage a team, and are not threatened by delegating responsibility while empowering and taking advantage of the skills of others. Finally, and importantly, these people are risk takers. They are going to break the rules and are prepared to do things differently. They are the ones who "think outside the box."

Can a successful rainmaker do it alone?

At the same time we studied the characteristics of successful rainmakers, we also analyzed the identifiable characteristics of client service partners. As a rainmaker, I cannot do my job without the invaluable client service partners that keep the train on the track and take my creative ideas and apply them in a practical way to benefit the client. Client service partners are analytical thinkers and score the highest on planning and detail which are the opposite characteristics of a successful rainmaker. Law firms need to recognize that these client service partners are critical to the way I sell my services. I can bring in all the business I want, but if I do not have a team of really fabulous lawyers to service the clients, who cares?

How did you develop your natural rainmaking traits into a large book of business?

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Upcoming Seminar

Both circumstances and a community presence assisted me in developing my book of business. I decided to go in-house after a couple of years at a large law firm focusing on employment law. I took an opportunity with a large bank and for six years headed up the section that litigated employment issues. We did all the litigation in house. During that time I networked with people in all the banks in California and became a trusted advisor to others in the banking industry, most of whom did not do their litigation in-house. I also knew that I was a good speaker and I thoroughly enjoy being in front of an audience. So I began speaking, everywhere - and anywhere - to develop a reputation in employment law. I took every single speaking engagement that was offered from the Rotary Clubs to State Bar events – basically wherever I was asked to speak. Through these appearances, I developed a presence in the employment defense lawyer bar and built relationships based upon my reputation. When I decided to leave the bank, I convinced the General Counsel to let me take all of the Bank's litigation with me. I went with a small boutique firm I had previously used for union issues at the bank. As a result of the relationships I had developed with the other banks during the time I was in-house and the reputation I had from speaking and litigating cases, I was able to convince these other banks to send their litigation to me. And that is how I developed my primary book of business. With that book of business came more notoriety with other types of businesses, and I was able to expand my client base to include various other industry sectors including high-tech, biotechnology, insurance, retail, and professional services. My clients are or become my friends. They come from my community, from my business contacts, from boards I am on, from speaking engagements, and from recommendations from plaintiffs' attorneys. I love building relationships and feeling like I am helping the businesses and people who are my clients.

Does personality play a factor in your rainmaking abilities?

Many people think that you have to be an extrovert to be a successful rainmaker. I do not agree with that. The quiet confidence and competence of an introvert can be just as appealing to some clients as the outgoing personality of an extrovert is for others. The traits that are important to rainmaking are expertise, client service, keeping the business interests of the client always in mind, finding solutions, being creative, and having a personality that resonates with the client. I learned from a partner at the boutique firm I went to when I left the bank just how important client service was to developing and growing the practice. He taught me to drop by a client just to say hi, to make sure everything that went out the door was perfect, and client development at major events was sometimes orchestrated, to make it seem natural. I think the biggest mistake people make when they are trying to develop clients is not being authentic. There is no one way to develop a relationship that will lead to a new client. It is personal. You need to focus on things that are in your comfort zone rather than trying to shoe horn yourself in to what other people do. So I have never played golf with a client. But I have had clients over to dinner, invited them to the opera, gone shopping with them, and talked with them about their families, their children, their career aspirations and their daily lives. It is the ability to enjoy making those connections from doing the things in your comfort zone that make people want to hire you.

What advice do you have for women who want to become better rainmakers?

Do not worry about how much time to devote to rainmaking, just think about what you want and go after it. There is no silver bullet or a standard formula. Once you get past building your reputation, client development is about building relationships, and how we go about that is personal for each of us. What I can say is that women need to stop worrying so much about what to do and just do it. We need to take risks, know that we will win some pitches and lose some, and make business development a part of our everyday behavior, as opposed to some insurmountable project. The truth is this that women, in general, excel at forming relationships with people. That is what we do. So if you can just be yourself and do what comes naturally, you will start to bring in clients.

Patricia Trombetta Smith
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Cincinnati, Ohio

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