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Rainmaker Spotlight

An Interview with Jennifer Doan

by Patricia J. Trombetta



Jennifer Doan is a partner in the law firm of Haltom & Doan and handles a diverse trial and appellate practice including intellectual property, personal injury, product liability, and pharmaceutical cases as well as class actions and business controversies. She is the mother of two teenagers and practices law with her

husband, Darby Doan, in their boutique law firm located in Texarkana, where her family has lived for four generations. Ranked in Best Lawyers in America from 2005-2013, she was selected as Best Lawyer in Tyler, Texas for 2013 by Best Lawyers. Jennifer was selected by Benchmark in the top 250 female lawyers in America in 2013, and as a Texas Super Lawyer each year since 2005. Jennifer is Vice-President of the American Board of Trial Advocates (East-TEXAS chapter) and is board certified in Civil Trial Law and Personal Injury Trial Law by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization. She also serves as Life Fellow of the Texas Bar Foundation and the Arkansas Bar Foundation.

What was your biggest influence as a young lawyer in becoming a rainmaker?

When I first started out, the law firms I worked in were predominately, if not completely, comprised of male attorneys. Therefore, for the majority of my early legal career I watched male rainmakers who had more of a physical presence than I had, or would ever have, making pitches. By going on pitches with them, I was able to analyze what worked for each one and formulate what would and would not work for me as a female. It was important to my development as a rainmaker to be involved in this process early in my career and to contribute to the pitches by putting together a brochure or a slide deck that could be sent in advance of the pitch or as part of it. Watching my male counterparts handling issues with potential clients deftly and with grace was invaluable to my formation as a rainmaker today.

Who were your mentors on the way to becoming the successful attorney you are today?

There was a female partner at another firm that I was working with on a pharmaceutical case early in my career who took an interest in me and asked all kinds of personal questions to get me to think about what I wanted and how I wanted to get

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there. She told me that I was really good at what I was doing and that she really wanted me to stay in practice despite my decision to start a family. She was instrumental in getting me to think about issues that needed to be resolved so that I could both practice law and have a family. I will forever be in her debt for opening herself up to me completely and for fielding all those questions that needed to be asked and answered. In turn, I try to be open, in my firm and outside of it, to younger lawyers to allow them to ask whatever they want and know it will be kept private.

What was the best advice you received as a young lawyer about rainmaking?

Jim Haltom taught me how to parlay my Texarkana practice into a national practice by teaching me to always be myself and focus on what I and my firm could do differently from another firm without criticizing the competition. It is important to know who your competition is when going into a pitch, but never say anything bad about the other firm; instead, focus on what you do differently and what your firm can do that you honestly can say would better benefit that particular client in that particular case. It is also particularly important to be honest even when it means divulging something that you believe may not be helpful to getting the work, especially when you know it may be a big factor in the potential client's decision-making process. It is similar to when you are in a trial: let the jury hear the difficult stuff from you first, not from opposing counsel.

What advice do you have for young lawyers wishing to become rainmakers?

Get your name out there. There are myriad opportunities to write articles for any number of publications. You can assist a senior partner in writing an article and share the byline. There are opportunities to speak at young lawyer or paralegal events, and these opportunities involve the same presentation skills that you will need in making a pitch to a client or an argument to the court. Taking advantage of these types of opportunities can result in getting your name out there from a substantive standpoint and also can assist you in networking within the field.

What advice do you have for more established lawyers who want to become better rainmakers?

One thing established lawyers have on their side is their experience. Sit down and put together a marketing plan in which you assess your strengths and weaknesses. Use your satisfied clients to assist you in rainmaking efforts. Have them sing your praises to potential clients. It is also helpful to call in the assistance of one of your partners who can speak about you and what you can do for the potential client. Someone else tooting your horn can make a difference in getting the work.

How do you balance rainmaking activities with the necessity of the billable hour?

I call it the whole person approach. Billable hours are what makes us profitable but rainmaking is a necessary part of the practice. A lawyer today needs to do both. We have to make a good conscious decision regarding how much time we are going to spend in each role. If you have three big trials in a



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year, you may not have time to make many client pitches, but you have to realize doing a good job for the client can result in making connections and obtaining new clients without making a pitch. I have received phone calls from large companies who saw me during oral argument or in trial and then sought me out to represent them in cases in which they needed assistance. In the end, making sure you meet your minimum billable hours is essential to any law firm, big or small, and may be more important than being able to go to the compensation committee at the end of the year and say that you made ten client pitches that year. You may need to do that, but you need to make sure you hit your minimum billable hours as well.

Do you face any particular challenges in rainmaking due to the size or practice areas of your firm?

I do not see any particular challenges; rather, I see opportunities due to the size of our firm and the fact we are a trial and appellate practice only. Although we are not a full-service law firm, we provide exceptional service in the areas in which we practice (trial and appellate work) and that expertise allows us to service clients of other firms and then give them back when the client's need is fulfilled. We get referrals from all over the nation due to our specialized practice and other firms are not afraid to send their clients to us for assistance in trial or to handle their appeal because they know we are not going to compete with them for other types of business. At the same time, other firms know we will do a good job for their clients and the clients will return to them for their other needs beyond the trial or appeal. The happiness of the client due to a job well done is resoundingly beneficial to us and generates good will with other law firms, which in turn results in more contacts and referrals. Working together, we can turn our perceived limitations into limitless opportunities.

[Back...](#)