

Acid Rainmakers: Short Term Dollars versus Long Term Growth



Marketing Consultant
Speaker
Coach

I serve clients by:

Creating or enhancing marketing culture and infrastructure

Aligning recruitment, hiring, training, and marketing programs

Helping professionals set and achieve individual business development goals through marketing plans, coaching and communication skill development

What's an acid rainmaker, you ask innocently? Come on. You know who I'm talking about. Nearly every firm has at least one: the lawyer or CPA who brings in the big dollars, or is a billing machine, but who is an absolute ogre much of the time. (These professionals come in both genders, but for purposes of this article, we'll use masculine pronouns.) He yells at team members, harrumphs around when he's feeling moody, and seizes every resource in the office – all because he's the big dog, the top biller, the acid rainmaker.

The question is: what do you do about him? Given all the business he brings in or all the hours he bills, *can* you do anything about him? Shouldn't you just throw him some fresh meat occasionally and let him keep doing what he does? In a word, no.

Nobody likes rainmakers more than I do. Most of them represent the best things about business: they're friendly, energetic, optimistic result-getters. However, some of them have spent so many years getting their egos stroked by clients and colleagues alike (not to mention making very big money) that they begin to believe their own press – and to behave badly. They begin to create acid rain inside their firms.

Other team members complain about Acid Rainmaker's roughshod ways, and partners hide from him to avoid being sucked into his resource-seizing vortex.

Pretty soon, people start thinking there really must be a better way to work – or maybe a better place to work.

There really is only one productive approach to the acid rainmaker: the managing partner has to have a serious talk with him. The managing partner must outline specifics of bad behavior and insist that such things not happen ever again. He can tell Acid that he has 90 days to mend his ways or he's out the door.

Very often, this kind of meeting is all it takes to help Acid improve his obnoxious behavior. Most times, though, managing partners never find out what might happen, because they don't like conflict and won't have such a meeting. So the acid rainmaking continues.

If you're the managing partner and you do decide to rein in AR, be prepared to lose him. He may well leave your firm, either to start his own or to go to your competitor. So be it. You are better off without this guy. While he certainly represents immediate money in your firm's collective pocket, he very likely is costing you a lot of money in employee turnover and decreased productivity. Never trade short-term gain for your firm's long-term growth and success.

Communicating Part I: The Power of Silence

Here is a description of Ann Huntress Lamont, venture capitalist and wife of Connecticut senatorial candidate Ned Lamont:

"She's wise and practical and doesn't talk when it's not important and does talk when it is."

This started me thinking about the best business developers I know in law and accounting. Almost without exception, they understand the power of silence in a conversation with a client or prospect. They simply know when

to stop talking. They know when to listen. They know when a message has been well delivered. And when it has been, they stop moving their lips. They give the other person time and space to respond, and are comfortable with the silence in the room. This is a very powerful technique.

The next time you're on the verge of tumbling down a slippery verbal slope, remember the wisest and most powerful people you know. They often are those who appear to have the least to say, who are usually sitting quietly

in a group and taking it all in, but who are straightforward and anything but reticent when they choose to speak.

It is this very reticence that makes people seem wise, and it is their willingness to speak when necessary that makes them powerful.

Communicating Part II: Powerful Speaking

Of course, when you do choose to speak, you will want to present your thoughts concisely and articulately -- in short, powerfully. Here a few hints:

- Don't let your voice move up at the end of a statement; you will sound questioning and indecisive.
- End your sentences definitively, using the silence as you would a period at the end of a sentence.
- Don't allow your words simply to trail off like ellipses in a written sentence.
- Moderate your speed. Too slow, and people will be snoring before you finish your thought. Too fast, and you will appear nervous and scattered.
- Eliminate verbal "bridges" (*uh, um, like, etc.*) as much as

you can. Use silence instead to gather your thoughts. While the silence may be thunderingly loud and interminably long in your own head, it really isn't to your listeners.

Keep Individual Marketing Plans Simple

Many years ago, when I was ready to graduate college and seek gainful employment, I applied to work at the Central Intelligence Agency. Recently, I have seen some individual marketing plans that rivaled the CIA application in their level of detail.

My experience has been that such intense templates frighten the hokey out of fledgling business developers. On the other side, experienced rainmakers usually don't have the time or the interest to complete so much paperwork, because they're busy bringing in new clients, selling more services to current clients, and making money for themselves and their partners. They usually will tolerate a brief outline, but not much more.

Marketing just doesn't have to be all that complex, and it should never take a cookie-cutter approach. Just as all humans differ somewhat, so should an individual marketing plan. For some people, a simple checklist of tasks with deadlines attached will be plenty. Some plans can and

should be more sophisticated, outlining how they will handle services to new clients, who their referral sources are now and who they should be in the future, and which specific individuals or businesses should be targeted as prospects. That's plenty of paper. Any more than that and you might be shooting yourself in the business development foot.

There are templates on my web site at <http://www.melindamarkets.com/marketingresources/guillemette-personalbizdevplan.pdf>. You're welcome to download them and modify them to suit your needs.

While the only real key to marketing is doing (by finding, creating, and sustaining relationships), planning is the best way to ensure you execute efficiently and effectively.