Marketing Tips for First-Year Associates

My colleague Glennie Green recently shared her thoughts about engaging associates in business development in her article "Business Development for Associates: Do It Early and Often." This is the time of year when many firms welcome their new associate class.

The transition from coveted law students being wooed by firms to the newest kid on the block can be hard.

First, you have to learn to be a lawyer. There is so much they don't teach you in law school. Ideally, you have chosen a firm that has a strong training program to help you learn the ropes. But fewer firms are ready to help you develop your marketing skills right out of the gate. Don't worry, though — with a little effort on your part, there are ways that even first-year associates can set themselves up for future success and simultaneously help the firm today.

Here are three tips to help first-year (and junior) law firm associates stand out.

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1. You only have one persona. In the age of social media, you do not have a private persona and a public persona.

Today's associates have never lived in a time without social media. It is a way to communicate with friends, find likeminded people, keep up with classmates and find an extended online community. But unlike the slogan "What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas," there is no such thing with social media.

No matter how you set your permissions on social media, someone can, and — if they want to — will, find the comment you wished you never made or the photo you just shouldn't have shared. And saying "LinkedIn is for my professional network and Facebook/Instagram/Twitter is for my personal network" is not enough. COVID has showed us that the lines between personal and professional are blurred. You can't be one person professionally and another in private.

We all know someone who has posted something online they wish they could get back. What is my suggested litmus test? Regardless of what sort of privacy filters you have set, don't post anything that you would be uncomfortable or embarrassed discussing with either your firm's managing partner or general counsel.

2. LinkedIn can help you stand out.

True story: Years ago, a senior partner was going to pitch a brand-new client. They couldn't find anyone who knew the players involved, so they did a little research on LinkedIn to find out more about the individuals attending the pitch meeting. Low and behold, a junior associate was directly connected to the key decision-maker. This junior associate played youth sports with the general counsel's child and the GC had been a coach at one time. This associate gave the senior partner a lot of insight into the GC's personality and thought process. The senior partner was extremely grateful for the intelligence, and in the end, was able to bring in a new client and a new matter, thanks to this insight.

No one ever believes this story, but it is 100 percent true. And the success was not just in the new piece of business or the new client. This story illustrates how you can stand out to others within the firm and contribute to its overall success. These two lawyers had not previously worked together. They were not in the same practice group. The likelihood that they would have met was slim, but for this situation.

Don't overlook your LinkedIn profile. Just because you have a job doesn't mean it is time to stop networking. Keep up with your law school colleagues; they will become in-house counsel one day. Make sure you are connecting with people from other aspects of your life — recreational sports, volunteer pursuits, family connections, etc. LinkedIn is more than just a way to manage your network. Its power is in how it allows you to share your connections with others and vice versa.

3. Get to know the firm and its key players.

Invariably, when you tell people you have joined your new firm, they will have one of two reactions: What do they do, or do you know so-and-so? Let's be honest, unless the firm is very small, you probably don't know so-and-so yet. But you have no excuse when it comes to understanding the firm. Surely you know enough to give someone a 15-second overview, but now that you are a full-time employee, it is time to dig deeper.

If your description of your firm starts with, "It's a full-service firm serving clients in X, Y, Z sectors," you need to go back to the drawing board. Sure, the firm might have all the requisite practices to call itself full-service, but every firm is best known for something. Do they focus on having deep knowledge in health care and all aspects affecting healthcare clients? Do they do corporate transactions, with particular skill in initial and follow-up public offerings? Clients want to hire a firm that has done work that is similar to what they need. They don't want to hire a firm that does a lot of things "fine." They want to hire a firm that really focuses its resources on the type of work they need and has a deep bench in that area.

Regardless of how long you have been at the firm, it is your responsibility to know what it does and who does what, and be able to connect prospects to the right person. Business development and marketing is everyone's responsibility.

What is your top marketing tip for new associates? Comment below or reach out to Michelle McCormick at mmccormick@jaffepr.com.