

CLIENT DEVELOPMENT

with Rudy Rivera

Doing a good job isn't always enough

By Rudy Rivera

Over the course of a lengthy legal career, which has included private practice and corporate counsel work, I've learned many lessons. Some were learned through trial and error while others were gleaned with the help of generous mentors.

In fact, over the past year, I have summarized my experiences into 20 of those valuable lessons, hoping that others may find my long trail of success and failures helpful, keeping in mind the timeless quote from inventor Thomas Edison: "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work."

Edison's "glass half-full" outlook on life undoubtedly played a role in his incredible record of success, as did an understanding that all of his inventions were the product of relationships he had built and cultivated along the way. A



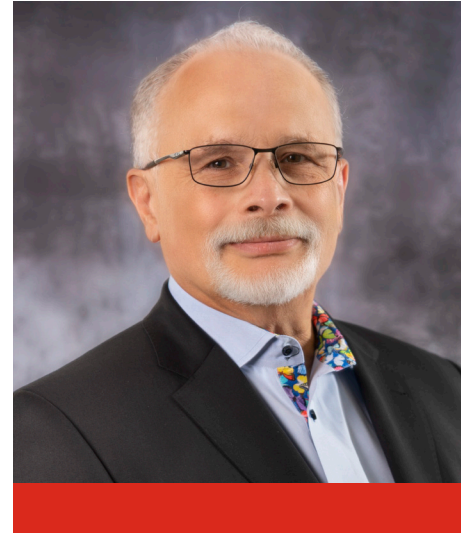
genius, he quickly discovered, can only go so far before the realities of a complex business world stand in the way.

The art of relationship building is a particularly important subject to master in the legal profession, which is dependent on client development to create a consistent book of business. That book, of course, is largely built on the quality of your work, coupled with a reputation for reliability and dependability in meeting client needs in a timely fashion.

And yet, being good at your craft is just part of the formula, which in full context contains a need for the development of people skills that can prove just as valuable and, in many cases, more important than your legal ability.

In building a book of business, it's vital to remember that trust will be a key factor in any form of success that you achieve. That point was clearly articulated by noted trial attorney William M. Gage in an article titled "The Three C's" that he also has delivered in speech form over the years as a fellow of the American Academy of Trial Lawyers.

"No lawyer can declare their own credibility," Gage wrote while also spelling out the importance of clarity and conviction. "It is either earned in the minds of the court or your adversaries (perhaps during a trial or in repeated



dealings), or it precedes you in the form of reputation. A dozen truthful statements don't earn you credibility, but one half-truth destroys it. Clarity is a moment-by-moment thing – you can be unclear and lost in the morning, but return in the afternoon and deliver the most cogent argument of your life. But credibility is nothing like her sister. When your credibility is destroyed in the morning, she does not reappear in the afternoon."

Relatedly, any display of arrogance is a sure-fire way to harm your reputation, thereby hampering the ability to attract new business or keep existing business. There is a fine line between confidence and arrogance. Confidence is the belief that you can do something well. Arrogance is the belief that you are better than everyone else. As I noted in one of my life lessons, "Arrogance Is the First Step to Ultimate Failure."

To illustrate that fact, the business world is full of companies that once dominated the market with their products and/or services and then strangely faded away. Those giants of commerce possessed significant market shares, far surpassing the competition before

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becoming complacent and abandoning further innovation efforts. BlackBerry is a prime example.

During its peak, BlackBerry controlled 50 percent of the mobile phone market in the U.S. and 20 percent worldwide. And then within the span of five years, BlackBerry went from being the most popular mobile device on the market to a phone stuck in the past after the company lost touch with the needs and wants of its customers.

The company's downfall should serve as a cautionary tale for everyone in the world of business, where the winds of fortune can change quickly and dramatically. Those who fail to adapt to changing market conditions are ultimately doomed to failure. Blockbuster and Kodak suffered the same fate.

A similar fate awaits lawyers who take their current clients for granted by neglecting to respond promptly to their ever-evolving needs. You must commit to strengthening your working relationship, utilizing strong communication, clearly defined expectations, and effective collaboration to harness the power to succeed. Building the relationship is the most important soft skill you can possess.

Trust is central to every client interaction and can serve as a major selling point in attracting new clients longing to work with attorneys who display honesty and integrity in everything they do. It also helps in solidifying relationships with current clients, which can lead to more legal work.

To build that trust, it is important to make the client feel like you have their

best interest at heart. You are not just another vendor, but rather you are going to do what's best for the client. You will be able to keep the client for a longer period and even get more legal work and referrals if you stay true to that mission.

