

Become a Rainmaker at Your Law Firm by Performing this One Simple Task Every Day

By [LawVision](#) on September 14, 2020

What if you were able to build a healthy book of business just by changing one tiny thing in your daily routine? Would you do it? Think about that – create just one simple regular daily habit, and the trajectory of your career will change for the better. What if you could do it in less than six minutes a day? Are you interested?

It's not as far-fetched as it sounds. Using one well-selected, foundational effort to achieve a much broader goal is something people do all the time. Chances are you do it yourself already. Perhaps you've established a pattern of rising every morning at a specific time. By forcing yourself to get up at precisely that same time, you've created a structure for your morning routine that allows the rest of your day to fall into place. Maybe you developed a habit in school of outlining each night the reading and lectures from that day, or perhaps you grew up in a family that had dinner together around the family table every night at the same time. Maybe you lost weight by simply refusing to eat anything after 6:30 every night or by writing down everything you ate throughout the day. Whatever it was, when you performed that simple task, other things fell into place and success ensued.

Keystone Habits

Charles Duhigg, author of the New York Times best-selling book, "[The Power of Habit](#)," calls these foundational efforts "keystone habits." Duhigg teaches that these habits "start a process that, over time, transforms everything." Once established, keystone habits begin to rearrange structures, dislodge old ways of thinking, and reshape patterns of behavior for the better. The keystone habit sets off what I call a "cascading sequence" that fulfills a broader objective.

[Admiral William H. McRaven](#), the naval officer credited for organizing and overseeing the special ops raid that led to the killing of Osama bin Laden, once delivered a commencement address by telling graduates to make their bed every morning. He went on to explain precisely how a cascading sequence works.

"If you make your bed every morning, you will have accomplished the first task of the day. It will give you a small sense of pride, and it will encourage you to do another task and another and another. By the end of the day, that one task completed will have turned into many tasks completed. Making your bed will also reinforce the fact that little things in life matter. If you can't do the little things right, you will never do the big things right. And, if by chance you have a miserable day, you will come home to a bed that is made – that you made – and a made bed gives you encouragement that tomorrow will be better."

The Rainmaker's Keystone Habit

So what is the keystone habit that creates the cascading sequence for business development success? It really does exist, and it really does work. I've seen it transform time-strapped lawyers struggling to build business into full-blown rainmakers. It's simple, doesn't take much time, and just about every other significant and essential business development activity flows from it.

Here it is:

Make a list.

That's it.

Simple. Easy. Effective. Make a list.

Just make a list of the prospects and clients you want to track and set aside one-tenth of an hour, one simple six-minute billing increment, each day to review the list and find one thing you can do that day to move a relationship forward.

I've trained and coached hundreds of lawyers to develop new business and, in my experience, nothing works better, nothing is more important, nothing brings results quicker than establishing this straightforward habit. Check your prospect pipeline every day and you will see the rest of your business development efforts fall in place. I've seen it work over and over again.

Shift from Awareness to Relationships

As you begin working that list, a cascading sequence will occur. The first thing you will notice is a shift of priority from awareness activities (writing, speaking, joining, attending) to one-on-one relationship-building activities. It's nearly impossible to be successful without making that shift. For some, it is a very difficult chasm to cross.

Right now, you or your firm have probably created some great content. Articles, posts, webinars, and white papers on topics of interest in the current market are flooding our inboxes. Much of this content is high quality and well-written. But many will make the mistake of assuming that is enough, that the genius in those writings is sufficient to build the trust needed to attract new work. But it's not. People buy things from people they know, like, and trust. Writing a good piece is only the beginning. One-on-one relationship building is the hard work that gets you to the goal and looking at your list every day is the foundational habit that will keep you on that track. Looking at a list of humans every day focuses you on people rather than events, relationships rather than writings, and conversations rather than speeches.

Writing, speaking, and attending events are not inherently ineffective business development activities, of course. They are a necessary part of any business development plan, but their primary purpose is to enable you to meet more individuals. Name recognition, street cred, and an impressive line in your bio are all nice to have bi-products of awareness activities, but unless they lead you to good people to put on your list, they have largely failed.

Improve Your Network

As you look at that list regularly, you will eventually realize that your network is not where you want it to be. You may have to admit that some people on your list have little chance of bringing you work. Once you start thinking about the type of contacts that can get you work, you will do what is necessary to find them. You will have the courage to take contacts off your list to make way for new opportunities. You will naturally want to develop a plan that lays out a strategy to do just that.

Improve Your Outreach

As you reach out to people on your list, you will seek more effective outreach methods. You will create more meaningful, substantive value propositions compelling enough to induce a prospect to request a follow-up conversation. Those conversations will allow you to ask more questions, uncover hidden challenges, and create opportunities for you to serve. As you stay in touch with these key contacts, your relationship and level of trust will grow. People on your list will begin to

regard you as a problem solver, an authority, and a trusted partner that can tackle thorny issues.

Build Confidence in your Efforts

As you work your list, you will stop worrying that you aren't doing enough to build your business. You will be confident enough to turn down invitations to conferences and lunches that don't fit into your business development plan and may, therefore, waste your time. Your efforts will be coordinated and efficient, avoiding wheel spinning on activities that don't matter. Your list will become written evidence of your planned, organized, and efficient business development efforts.

Can one Key Habit Really Make Such a Difference?

Duhigg tells the story of Paul O'Neill. A former government bureaucrat called in to save aluminum and manufacturing giant Alcoa in the late 1980s. O'Neill stood at the podium at his first investor meeting and announced that his sole focus as CEO would be on worker safety. He side-stepped financial questions and inquiries about industry inventories and capital ratios and asked to be measured solely on safety. Shocked, investors rushed the doors to sell Alcoa stock. O'Neill pressed forward with his plan. His focus on one key habit created a cascade sequence that spread to all facets of the company. His emphasis on the importance of safety began to unify the company. It increased communication, bonded labor and management around a common cause, and opened up work inefficiencies for restructuring. Costs came down and quality went up. Within a year of that investor meeting, Alcoa's profits hit a record high. By the time O'Neil retired 14 years later, the company's annual net income was five times larger than before his arrival, and its market capitalization had risen by \$27 billion. Key habits can make a difference and establishing a key habit for your business development efforts will create a cascade sequence for you.

The Pipeline Challenge

Working your list every day will create a cascade sequence that will improve your business development results dramatically. I've seen it work too many times to come to any other conclusion. But don't take my word for it. Test it yourself. Look at your list every day for 30 days. Consider one name each day and ask yourself what you can do to best serve that person. Think about the set of circumstances that exist around your relationship now and what set of circumstances needs to exist before new work materializes. Find something that moves you in that direction. It could be something as simple as an email to stay in touch or something more complicated like a formal proposal. Whatever it is, identify it in those six minutes, create a plan to get it done, and then move on to the next billable moment.

By the end of that 30 days, your own cascade sequence will set you on a course for stronger relationships, a deeper network, a more efficient process, and, ultimately, increased revenue.

Take the challenge. You'll be happy you did.