

Rainmaker Q&A: Greenberg Glusker's Andrew Apfelberg

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Andrew M. Apfelberg, partner at Greenberg Glusker Fields Claman & Machtinger LLP in Los Angeles, is a corporate and finance attorney for middle-market companies throughout the United States. He acts as their outside general counsel and advises them in significant transactions such as mergers and acquisitions, private equity and other financings, joint ventures and licensing.

He has particular expertise in the branded consumer products, manufacturing and distribution, new media and technology industries. His clients benefit from his business and finance background gained from working for investment bank Houlihan Lokey Howard & Zukin prior to attending law school.

Andrew is a past president of the Association for Corporate Growth in Los Angeles and is a co-chairman of its annual business conference.



Andrew M.
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Q: What skill was most important for you in becoming a rainmaker?

A: Becoming an active listener and being willing to share aspects of my personal life have been the two most important skills that enabled me to bring in clients. I learn more about prospects, referral sources and opportunities by listening than I do by talking. Being 100 percent present and paying attention is the first step. The second is to focus on key words and subjects that come up multiple times to get a sense of what is really going on. Sometimes the true need or referral “trigger” is hidden in the subtext or word choices. My job is to decipher it. On the flip side, I also need to open up, show my human side and share what is happening in my life in order to create a genuine connection with the other person. That connection needs to be both professional and personal to be most effective.

Q: How do you prepare a pitch for a potential new client?

A: I first try to learn as much as I can about the prospect — what do they do, who do they do it with, which of their competitors are most problematic, how are they perceived in the industry? I then try to learn as much as I can about the principals of the client with whom I will be meeting and whether we know people in common or are involved in similar organizations. I then put together a list of other clients with whom I have worked or matters that were similar to this one so that I can share that as appropriate.

Q: Share an example of a time when landing a client was especially difficult, and how you handled it.

A: There was a client that I really wanted to work with but they were used to using solo practitioners or small firms that had lower billing rates. They knew that they wanted the expertise in the branded consumer products industry and investment banking background that I had (and their current attorney did not) but were worried about moving to a larger firm. They were concerned about fees and getting proper attention. I overcame that in a handful of ways.

First, I wrote into the engagement letter that I would be actively involved in all aspects of the representation and only delegate to others with their prior permission. Second, we agreed that I would estimate costs at the start of a particular portion of the deal and identify tasks that they could take on themselves if they wanted to save costs. Third, we had the legacy attorney take the first cut of the disclosure schedules (it was an M&A deal) which allowed us to gather a lot of data very quickly at their lower billing rate. Finally, we made project management a regular part of our weekly status calls.

Q: What should aspiring rainmakers focus on when beginning their law careers?

A: Aspiring rainmakers should take some time for self-evaluation before running out to start networking. They should consider what it is that they are really passionate about (whether a particular industry or type of matter), the environment in which they are most comfortable (e.g., a large networking event versus an intimate gathering, a speaking engagement versus writing an article, an alumni association versus a charitable board), and how they and their firms are perceived in the marketplace. By doing only that which you are most passionate about, in an environment that you are most comfortable in and in which you and your firm are most highly valued, you give yourself the best chance for success generally and especially early on (which is so critical to building confidence and momentum).

Q: What's the most challenging aspect of remaining a rainmaker?

A: The most challenging aspect is maintaining a work-life balance because many of the time demands for "rainmaking" conflict with hours that otherwise would be spent with family or on hobbies or exercise. So as to not become resentful or burn out, it is important to set clearly defined goals for the amount of time to be spent on both and to prioritize which work events and family events will bring you the most satisfaction. It is critical to be proactive in scheduling so that you get the most out of each hour spent and the others you interact with get the best of you when you are together.

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