

SPECIAL REPORT: D.C. RAINMAKERS

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New partners have already proved their prowess as lawyers. Now, the next hurdle is learning how to generate business. Legal Times special reports editor Jenna Greene asked seven D.C. rainmakers how they landed their first clients...

Scott Gilbert, Gilbert Heintz & Randolph

"I frankly don't remember the identity of the first client I generated, but it would have been while I was a midlevel associate at Covington & Burling close to 20 years ago. The client likely was a mass tort defendant concerned about insurance coverage of the underlying tort claims. I suspect that client called me, as have many other clients in the ensuing two decades, based on recommendations from third parties concerning work I had performed for firm clients on related matters.

Younger lawyers should recognize that such recommendations often come not only from satisfied past or current clients, but also from other professionals who have had an opportunity to observe your work, including principals and lawyers of adversaries, law firms unable to take matters because of potential conflicts, and academics and consultants with whom one has worked. Such recommendations most often are not sufficient in and of themselves, but they are an important introduction, even where a potential client is interviewing several law firms.

In the end, experience provides the opportunity to create a positive reputation and to develop sufficient judgment and confidence that, in a first meeting or on a first telephone call, a prospective client will feel comfortable with you and in relying upon you. In my view, young partners, as well as senior associates, should not be pressured to develop clients; rather, they should be provided the substantive and client experience from which they can build.

The key to successful business generation is doing your job, doing it to a sustained level of excellence, with care, creativity, and a sense of perspective, and being able to convey that to a potential client. The law firm can assist in this significantly. As we tell our younger lawyers: "You have only two jobs here. One is to serve the clients to the best of your ability, and the second is to become the best lawyer you can be. And, as far as you are concerned, we also have only two jobs. The first is to serve the clients to the best of our ability, and the second is to help you do your jobs."

Scott Gilbert specializes in complex dispute resolution. His clients include Pfizer Inc. and Millennium Chemicals.