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STRIVE FOR PERFECTION, BUT ONLY SETTLE FOR EXCELLENCE

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Everyone has a story about his or her first client or first job. It always seems like serendipity in hindsight, where the stars aligned and someone caught a very lucky break. In fact, there is often additional detail that reveals the coordinated long-term effort required to create that opportunity and others like it. “The challenge is that people want the silver bullet, the formula, the magic potion,” says Bruce Jones, Programming Director at the Disney Institute in Orlando, which trains executives worldwide on adopting the Disney model of creating an emotional connection to their brands. “It is not magic, it is day-in and day-out commitment,” he adds.

That commitment might come in the form of networking or it might manifest itself in one’s dedication to improving his or her community. Ultimately, it is demonstrated in ways that individuals can easily tailor to their own strengths and personalities. I had the privilege of meeting with Jones at the Contemporary Hotel on a recent visit to Walt Disney World. He shared some of the ideas that members of the legal community can use to customize the Institute’s philosophy of teaching “a common sense approach with a unique Disney difference.”

Each of us can take a common sense approach with our own branding, which reflects our character and capability. “We are not perfect,” says Jones. “We strive for perfection and we’ll settle for excellence, but we won’t settle for anything less.”

Establish a Plan: While Jones is counseling global businesses, this mindset is just as applicable to a small court reporting firm, the administrator of a law firm or a lawyer building his or her practice. The idea is to craft a plan and commit to a routine set of activities that contributes to your success.

Start with an image of where you would like to be in a year, five years or even ten. Make a list of each activity that will help you get to that point. Then simply add them to your plan next to

dates on which you should complete them. Maintain an electronic calendar to send you automatic reminders.

Be Accountable: Supplement those digital reminders by telling someone about your goals so that they can serve to support your efforts with encouragement. “There have to be standards in place that people know and understand, [to] which you can ... hold them accountable,” says Jones. That accountability is an essential component of achievement. Rainmakers often work in tandem. They motivate, inspire and support one another.

Whether it is during an annual review or a staff meeting, make a commitment to someone you trust. Goals are often set in conversation and executed through collaboration.

Listen Proactively: It is that collaboration and those conversations that serve as a critical hallmark of success. Disney frequently surveys its customers. “Listening is our key strategy,” Jones says. Zoomerang.com and SurveyMonkey.com are both free online tools that allow you to create an anonymous survey and collect data about your performance or the interests of your clients/future employers. Consider creating a questionnaire in your industry to better understand the needs of certain organizations, whether or not they are your clients. Partner with a publication (e.g., an industry or chapter newsletter) to share this data on a broader scale so that there is a universal benefit.

In doing so, you will reflect not only your character, but also the magical power of a coordinated effort to enhance your business development.

Ari Kaplan, author of the Amazon bestseller The Opportunity Maker (Thomson-West 2008), uses the power of creative networking and article marketing to establish dynamic relationships for individuals who want to develop business by meeting decision-makers, fostering long-term interaction and standing out in today’s stagnant economy. Visit www.30MinuteThursdays.com to learn more about his popular webinar series and consider sharing a subscription with your clients and prospects.