Summer associates can write their way to success

Co-authoring an article with a partner offers an opportunity to shine.

By Ari L. Kaplan
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SUMMER ASSOCIATES who want an offer at the end this summer should write it. One of the best-kept secrets of new associate selection is that with most skill levels being equal, the person who makes life easiest for the decision-makers at the firm will stand out. Perform great research, stay available, demonstrate enthusiasm and write. Write strong memoranda, write “thank you” notes and write articles. By

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spotlighting lawyers and legal issues, for the benefit of and alongside those with whom they work, associates can solidify their place within the ever-powerful business-development paradigm.

Writing demonstrates a genuine interest in the perspective and skill of another colleague. More importantly, though, it gives summer associates an opportunity to develop meaningful connections to those lawyers who will be evaluating their performance all summer. Summer associates who save partners time and alleviate the burden of performing certain client-generation activities will learn much more about the partners and the firm than their peers will. They will also acquire a deeper understanding of the clients and the work that interests them the most. They may even learn some techniques for becoming rainmakers after graduation and beyond.

Offering to write about, for or with a partner conveys a sense of excitement in a uniquely tangible and lasting format. Summer associates can easily demonstrate their honest enthusiasm by profiling someone’s noteworthy accomplishments and experience for the benefit of the entire professional community. College and law school alumni magazines, for example, may be ideal venues for these profiles. Web sites that focus on the legal community are also interested in content of this type. Although lawyers find great success at business development through publishing, they are limited by the lack of the one advantage that a summer associate often has: time.

After a few weeks of lavish lunches, baseball games and golf outings, summer associates should identify the lawyers with whom they would like to work and create an opportunity to collaborate with them by writing together. Before approaching them with an idea, a summer associate should study their practices and clients. In addition, he or she should review their profiles on the firm’s Web site to determine where they have been published and issues on which they may have written (or even spoken). This will give the associate a sense of what the lawyers find most interesting.

Studying the practice groups

Summer associates shouldn’t be discouraged if their first ideas are rebuffed. They should continue their research by reviewing Web sites related to the practice group in which they are working and the industry or industries of the various affiliated clients. Then, they should begin sharing breaking developments with the lawyers in their circle or elsewhere. A summer associate will distinguish himself or herself from the class in a way that is professional (as opposed to the ridiculous dancer at the outing) and will almost certainly realize great rewards for his or her efforts. This possibility isn’t as likely at a networking function at which lawyers have an obligation to get to know as many of the seasonal hires as possible.

As summer associates compile their list of topics about which to write, they should ask lawyers at the firm which trade publications and newsletters they read. They should seek the advice of the resident librarian as well. The librarian will often have information on which newspapers and periodicals particular lawyers prefer. Nor should they forget online opportunities. The goal is to co-author and demonstrate enthusiasm, not simply to see the item on the newsletter or even in print.

Lawyers are often looking for opportunities to reconnect with and celebrate their clients. It helps build rapport, but also maintains a consistency in their communication even when there is no matter pending. If summer associates can help these lawyers in that search, they will be praised for their efforts.

Following a short assignment, a summer associate could suggest to the assignee...
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ing partner the possibility of writing about a client or its matter (in general terms only, if appropriate). He or she may even want to interview the client with the partner for a possible quote about an industry trend. As with the firm's librarian, one can ask the client what magazines the in-house legal team reads. A summer associate might suggest to the partner that the partner ask the client for other in-house contacts that may be appropriate for a short-interview and quotation. This could help build relationships with prospects.

In anticipation of publishing an article, it's advisable to search the Internet for other lawyers in the same practice area and identify the publications in which their work has appeared. If a summer associate happens to see that a senior lawyer with the same expertise at another respected firm writes for a particular trade journal, he or she should make a note and keep that publication on the list to pitch. This will help in an initial discussion about the idea of writing an article, but it will also demonstrate one's ability to execute on a plan. It shows foresight and the anticipation of a future need.

Networking highlights who one is, but writing provides the chance to share who others are and what they know. It is truly a self-marketing platform, because it gives someone the chance to collaborate and foster development for the benefit of others, which in time will benefit everyone. So those who want an offer this summer should write one.